

*Written in Detention*

# **A MARXIST LOOKS AT THE HISTORY OF CEYLON**

**by N. SANMUGATHASAN**

**"Impartiality is Either the Ignorance of a  
Fool or the Trickery of a Knave"**





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This second edition is dedicated to my year-old grand-son, Satyan, in the hope that he will tread the path of revolution but avoid the mistakes I had to commit because of lack of correct guidance in my young days.

December, 1974



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அன்பளிப்பு

சுப்பிரமணியம் அருள்பிரகாசம்

நினைவாக

“கோகனதை வாசம்”

சுதுமலை (மத்தி)

மானிப்பாய்.







## THE PREFACE

This book was written during the ten months that I was unjustly imprisoned by the Sirimavo Bandaranaike government in 1971. I was determined not to let the enemy get the better of me by demoralising me. Equally, I decided to turn a bad thing into a good thing.

Several times, in our Party, we had taken decisions to write a history of Ceylon, because it is a cardinal condition that revolutionaries should know the history of their country. Comrade Mao Tsetung has said: "No political party can possibly lead a great revolutionary movement to victory unless it possesses revolutionary theory and *a knowledge of history* and has a profound grasp of the practical movement."

It was this that inspired me to write this book. I wanted to put into the hands of our comrades and our sympathisers a Marxist interpretation of Ceylon's history—whatever shortcomings it might contain. Some people might imagine that my qualification to write this book was the fact that I had obtained a degree in History at the University of Ceylon. But, in those days, even though I did Oriental history, out of the ten papers I answered for my final examination, only one had a reference to Ceylon history. That, too, was entitled "South Indian and Ceylon History". Therefore, all the Ceylon history I know I learned after I left the University. I have subjected this knowledge to a Marxist analysis.

Many of my interpretations are not going to please many, because I have attempted to demolish many myths which have hitherto gone as facts. But this book was not written to please anyone. It was written for the purpose of knowing the past in order to understand the present and to shape the future. If it helps, even in a small way, in this task, I shall be amply rewarded.







## CHAPTER I

### Ancient Ceylon

As any geography or history book will tell us, Ceylon is an Island whose shape has been compared to a mango as well as to a pearl and which lies at the extremest southern point of the sub-continent of India. The narrowest point that separates Ceylon from India is only twenty miles. In fact, fanciful historians have compared Ceylon to a pearl hung on the pendant of India.

This close proximity of Ceylon to India is being stressed at the very outset, because if any single geographical factor has influenced Ceylon's history and politics more than any other factor, it is this nearness to India, from which Ceylon has inherited its peoples, its languages, its religions, its civilisations, its conquerors, and also a lot of political ideas.

It was from India that the largely mythical Vijaya and his followers landed in Ceylon in the 6th century B.C. (about 543 B.C.) to found what has now come to be called the Sinhalese race. This is not to say that settled life did not exist in Ceylon before this period. But this is as far as recorded history goes.

The famous Chinese traveller Fa Hien, who visited Ceylon in 412 A.D. says that Ceylon "had originally no inhabitants, but only demons and dragons dwelt in it. Merchants of different countries came here to trade. At the time of traffic, the demons did not appear in person, but only exposed their valuable commodities with the value affixed. Then the merchantmen, according to the prices marked, purchased the goods and took them away. But in consequence of these visits, men of other countries, hearing of the delightful character of the people, flocked here in great numbers, and so a great kingdom was formed."

This account probably means that the original inhabitants of Ceylon must have been less civilised than the Indo — Aryans who later invaded the country. But, at least, they seem to have been sufficiently civilised to charge fixed prices for the merchandise they exchanged with foreign traders, probably Arabs.



From this we can infer that Ceylon has had a civilised existence for a period of over 3000 years and that the ancestors of the present inhabitants of the island came over from India in the 6th century B.C. It would also seem that the original settlers, who belonged to the Indo—Aryan stock, came from Northern India (probably from both west and east) as distinct from those of Dravidian stock, who came over from south India much later.

The early Sinhalese kings seem to have maintained relations with the Roman Empire as far back as the 1st century A.D. and with the Chinese court from the 4th century A.D.

All these show that we are inheritors of an ancient civilisation which has had relations with the early Egyptian, Roman and Chinese civilisations. But we should also not forget that, although this civilisation had many achievements to its credit—the principal one being the wonderful system of irrigation through gigantic tanks built by the early Sinhalese kings—it was based on feudal exploitation under which the lot of the people was a sorry one. This should make us not to look back to the ancient glories of our civilisation—a favourite pastime of bourgeois politicians, who wish to distract the attention of the people from immediate tasks—but to look forward to a much brighter future based on the abolition of all exploitation.

Ceylon is a tropical island, lying a little to the north of the equator. Its area is 25,481 square miles. The distance from north to south is 270 miles, while that from east to west is 140 miles. The island is roughly divided into two by a central mountain range, which occupies the south-central part of Ceylon, and which rises to its highest point of 8,292 feet at the Pidurutalagala peak. As a result of the south-western monsoon, which occurs generally from May to September, and which brings in plentiful rain, the central and south west regions receive the highest rainfall and are generally referred to as the wet zone. The mountain range forms a sort of water shed. The area to the north-east of the range is fed by the north-east monsoon, which falls between October to April. The rainfall during this monsoon is less and the area served by this monsoon is generally called the dry zone.



The Dry Zone accounts for the greater part of Ceylon, and is historically the most important part, because it was the cradle of the Sinhalese civilisation. Although today less densely populated than the Wet Zone, the Dry Zone represents the area where the early civilisation of the Sinhalese flourished. As Dr. Paranavitana has pointed out, "It was here that the Sinhalese settled in early times and subsequently built their cities and religious monuments". He also points out that "productivity of those areas was increased by an elaborate system of irrigation which attained its highest development in the 7th century, and was restored to its maximum potentiality by Parakrama Bahu I in the second half of the 12th century".

Dr. Paranavitana has pointed out that "the Indo-Aryans who came to Ceylon and colonised it possessed a knowledge of both rice cultivation and of irrigation. From this basic, elementary knowledge there developed later the greatest engineering skill exhibited in the ancient Sinhalese Kingdom, namely the progressive building up of a colossal and complex system of inter-related dams, canals and tanks, mingling the waters of rivers flowing in different directions. No parallel system of the same magnitude or intricacy existed in contemporary India."

The kings, whose names are most intimately connected with the greatest heritage of our past, are Pandukabbaya, who started the building of tanks, Mahasena (276-303 A.D.) who was called the Builder of Tanks, and during whose reign took place a remarkable advance in the science and practice of irrigation engineering as a result of which the first colossal reservoirs—the most famous of which was the Minneriya Tank—were built and Parakrama Bahu the Great, who brought it to its perfection. It is worth while to quote the famous saying of Parakrama Bahu I, to which he is said to have given utterance when he was ruler of Mayarata before he unified Ceylon under his rule. He is reported to have said: "In the realm that is subject to me there are, apart from many strips of country where the harvest flourishes mainly by rain water, but few fields which are dependent on rivers with permanent flow or on great reservoirs. Also by mountains, by thick jungle and by widespread swamps my kingdom is much straitened. **Truly in such a country not even a little water that**



comes from the rain must flow into the ocean without being made useful to man. Except at the mines where there are precious stones, gold and the like, in all other places the laying out of fields must be taken in hand".

When he became sole ruler of Lanka, he is reported to have constructed or restored 3,910 canals, 163 major tanks and 2,376 minor tanks—an unequalled achievement. His greatest achievement, however, was the construction of the Parakrama Samudra—formed by damming the Kara (Amban) Ganga at Angamadilla and conveying the water to the reservoir by the Angamadilla ala. It also received water from the Giritala Wewa by canal through two intervening tanks".

It must be pointed out here that it was this elaborate but brilliant system of irrigation which is a tribute to the engineering skill of the ancient Sinhalese that was the basis of all the glories of the ancient Sinhalese civilisation—both during the Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa periods. With the collapse of this system of irrigation—brought about by foreign invasions and internal discord to which we will refer later—begins the decline of the ancient Sinhalese civilisation.

Though Ceylon can be geographically divided into the Dry Zone and the Wet Zone, politically it was divided into three territories in ancient times: (1) Rajaratta, which was basically the whole of the Dry Zone west of the Mahaweli Ganga—Ceylon's biggest river, with its Capital at Anuradhapura, (2) Ruhunu-ratta, which is the country lying to the east of the Mahaweli, but including all the southern parts including Batticolo, Monaragala, Hambantota, Matara and Galle districts—with Tissamaharama as its capital; and (3) Malaya-dese, which roughly corresponds to the present Up-country.

No proper geological survey of Ceylon has ever been done. But, from ancient days, Ceylon has been famous for its Pearl Banks off Mannar, and for chanks (curch shells). Apart from this it has always been known for its plentiful supply of precious stones, principally rubies and sapphires, which are supposed to have been washed down to lower levels and within man's reaches as a result of the erosion of the high peaks, which are of very ancient

geological origin and which, at one time, are said to have been 10,000 feet higher than they are today. That is why Ceylon was once referred to as Ratnadipa, the 'Island of Gems'.

Natural deposits of iron ore seem to have existed from ancient times. The other valuable minerals found in Ceylon are graphite (plumbago), limestone, clay, ilmenite and monozite. Ceylon has always been famous for its spices. More recent geological surveys suggest the existence of petrol in the north-east of Ceylon.

Unfortunately, the sources of the early history of Ceylon are poor. For the most part, much of the early history of Ceylon is derived from the Mahawamsa and its later continuation, the Culawamsa. The Mahawamsa was put into writing only in the 6th Century A.D. and was composed in Dhatusena's reign by a learned Buddhist priest, by the name of Mahanama, who was an uncle of the king. All his sources were records preserved by the Sangha (priests) of the Mahavira. The story was continued in the same style in the reign of Parakrama Bahu and carried down by later scholars from time to time to the end of the 18th century.

Although Ceylonese generally take pride in the possession of such an ancient historical record, and although it is undoubtedly valuable as a source of Ceylon history, its impartiality is open to doubt. It had the disadvantage of having been written by a member of the Sangha at a time when it had obtained a position of influence as advisers to the kings. The natural tendency was to praise those kings who supported the Sangha, and to speak disparagingly of those who did not.

What happens when a monk becomes a historian is that religion and history tend to get mixed up. The result is that such stories as that the Buddha before his passing away had entrusted the safety of Lanka to Sakra, because he knew that his doctrine would eventually be established in that island; and that, on receiving the Buddha's command; Sakra summoned Vishnu and entrusted the protection of the island to him—such legends tend to become accepted as fact and history. In the same way, some Buddhist historians even claim as a historical fact that the Buddha



visited Ceylon three times during his life and that, on one of these occasions, left the imprint of his foot-print on Adam's Peak. The only historian who had sufficient scientific objectivity and courage to dispute this story is Dr. Paranavitana, who has pointed out that similar legends are to be found in other Buddhist countries.

This situation was made worse as a result of a split that took place within the Sangha itself. In all doctrinal and disciplinary matters, all Buddhist priests in Ceylon accepted the authority of the Mahavira, which was considered the established Buddhist church from its inception. The first split took place during the reign of Vattagamani Abhaya (103-102 B.C. and 89-77 B.C.). The new sect was known as the Abhayagiri sect after the name of the teacher, whose interpretation of the Buddhist doctrines was adopted by this sect. Later on, another faction broke away from the Abhayagiri sect, which was to have the Jetavana monastery built by Mahasena as its headquarters.

Although there were certain differences in text and interpretation, all these three sects belonged to the Theravada or the traditional school of Buddhism. It is to be noted that before Buddhism came to be preached in Ceylon, it had already split into eighteen different sects since the death of its founder.

But, now, a new movement gained ground among the Buddhists in India. Dr. S. Paranavitana explains the new philosophy as follows: "The ideal of the Bhikkus of the Theravada as well as of the older sects was the attainment of Nirvana by pursuing the career of a disciple or Sravaka. This led to one's own salvation. The teacher of this new movement proclaimed that the nobler ideal for a Buddhist should be, like the Master Himself, to follow the career of a Bodhisatva, striving for the salvation of all humanity. They, therefore, strive not to become arhats in this life, but to become Buddhas in the future. This they characterised as the great career, the Mahayana. The goal of working for one's own salvation they stigmatised as the lower career, the Hinayana".

There is no doubt that this schism in the Buddhist church is similar in some respects to the schism brought about in the



Roman Catholic Church by the Reformation. Like the Reformists, the Mahayana school of Buddhism was more liberal, and, therefore, progressive and attracted to its fold the bolder philosophers. But what is of significance as far as Ceylon is concerned is that the Mahayana doctrine found disciples in the Abhayagiri monastery, while it was stoutly opposed by the Mahavira, which became the stronghold of the traditional school of Theravada Buddhism.

Thus, the Mahavira taught the teachings of the "southern" Buddhists of Ceylon, Burma, Siam and Cambodia while the Abhayagiri monastery taught the teachings of the "northern" doctrines of Kashmir, Tibet and China, learned from the Indian Vaituliya.

It is to the heated controversy that arose as a result of this doctrinaire difference between the Mahavira and the Abhayagiri monasteries that we referred to as the main obstacle to an accurate interpretation of early Ceylon History. Because, in the course of this furious debate, which sometimes took the form of wholesale persecution of the opposite sect and which began in the reign of Voharaka Tissa (215—237 A.D.) the records kept by the Abhayagiri monastery were burnt and destroyed. Thus, the victory of the Mahavira or the traditional school became complete and it is their version of Ceylon's history that goes as history today.

Undoubtedly, the greatest single influence on early Ceylon history was the introduction of Buddhism in the reign of Devanampiya Tissa (250 - 210 B.C.). It is not the purpose of this essay to assess the influence of Buddhism on Ceylon or its history. But one cannot pass without pointing out the fact that if the teachings of the Buddha influenced the great Indian Emperor Asoka in the 3rd century B.C. to realize the folly of violence after he had conquered Kalinga and to foresake violence thereafter and to devote his energies to the spreading of the new faith not only in India, but also in the surrounding countries, no such influence seems to have been felt by the latter-day converts in Ceylon. From Duttu-gemunu to Parakrama Bahu and later on, one and all of the Sinhalese kings resorted to violence in pursuit of their ambition to ascend the throne. In almost all cases, they had the



blessings of the Sangha. Kings like Parakrama Bahu undertook foreign invasions, too, against India and Burma — no doubt with the full blessings of the Sangha!

Have we, therefore, the right to talk about the influence of Buddhism in Ceylon? Or about Ceylon being the repository of Buddhism in its purest form?

The advent of Buddhism certainly had other effects. More than the arrival of the earlier Indo-Aryan settlers, it was the advent of Buddhism that brought the culture of the Indian continent to Ceylon — the art of writing, architecture, sculpture, literature, etc. It is because Indian culture penetrated to our island along with the advent of Buddhism that there arose in certain circles the talk about a Buddhist civilisation and the tendency to identify the civilisation of the Ceylonese with Buddhism. That is how, to-day, you hear chauvinistic politicians talking about “the country, religion and language”. Is such an identity possible? Is there such a thing as a Buddhist civilisation? To postulate such a possibility is to deny that there are Buddhists who are not Sinhalese, or that they have been influenced by Buddhism. Civilisation is the way of life of a people, and the set of values to which they learn to conform in the course of life. Many influences shape this development. But to talk of civilisation in terms of religions is to introduce a divisive concept which does not augur well for the development and fusion of multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-lingual peoples into a single nation — which everyone accepts should be our aim.

Nor is there a basis for such a connotation. Buddhism was basically a revolt of the Kshatriya or princely class against Brahminical domination of society. Buddha belonged to the Kshatriya caste and led this revolt. That is how you account for the anti-Brahminical and atheistic aspects of Buddhism. But the Buddha's teachings were subjected to many changes before long. That is how you account for the appearance of eighteen different sects even before Buddhism reached Ceylon. One reason may be that an atheistic doctrine was far too ahead of the time for the 6th century. B.C.



Hinduism fought a rearguard action, and, though defeated at the beginning, succeeded in re-absorbing Buddhism into its fold. That is how Buddhism disappeared in India. But, even in Ceylon, the influence of Hinduism was felt. This was made easier by the habit of the Sinhalese kings, coming down from the time of the mythical Vijaya, of going to South India for their queens. The latter very naturally brought their gods along with them. Thus, the Hindu gods were admitted into a Buddhist pantheon. That is how the worship of Vishnu became an accepted practice in Buddhism as practiced in Ceylon. If one goes to see the ruins of the palace of Nissanka Malla in Polonnaruwa, you will see the ruins of two temples in front of the palace. One was the Buddhist temple at which the king worshipped. The other was a temple dedicated to Vishnu, at which his Indian queen worshipped. Later on Vishnu was admitted inside the same temple. Today, even such an out and out Hindu practice as dancing the 'Kavadi' has become a Buddhist practice. We have heard of Srimavo Bandaranaike dancing the 'Kavadi' at the notorious Lunawa temple, which is patronised by top society people. The sight would have revolted Lord Buddha and should revolt any genuine Buddhist!

Thus, quite a few of the influences which we believe are Buddhist are in reality taken over from Hinduism. In the courts of most early Sinhala kings, even during the Polonnaruwa period, where Buddhism was the official religion, the Brahmins occupied a prominent place as purohitas and performed many functions, such as anointing the king on the day of the coronation, fixing the times for important events, etc.

However, there was one negative influence of Buddhism, which we cannot gloss over. Very early in Ceylon's history, the Sinhala kings from the time of Vattagamani (103-102 B.C. and 89-77 B.C.) introduced the practice of donating lands to monasteries for the Sangha to derive revenue therefrom. This is in complete contradiction to the principles of Buddhism, because members of the Sangha were to be free from material attachments. Vattagamani introduced this practice to reward the priest who had helped him while he was in exile. Other kings continued this practice for the purpose of winning the favour of

the Sangha. The bestowal of material benefits to the Sangha led to the increase of its numbers, because the members of the Sangha began to be assured of a good life — a far cry from the teachings of the Buddha. Thus, these priests became parasites on society — doing no productive work but receiving all their wants. The increase in their numbers was bound to have an adverse effect on the economy and this factor has been adduced as a reason for the collapse of the Polonnaruwa kingdom by some scholars.

This fate did not overtake the Mahayana sect, because the priests of this order did manual labour of a productive nature.

Therefore, it would be more correct to speak about a Ceylonese or Sinhalese civilisation, which is a fusion of Indian culture with the pre-Sinhala culture of the island, and which had been influenced both by Buddhism and Hinduism and later by Christianity — although the influence of Buddhism is more dominant.

The second biggest influence on Ceylon's history were the foreign invasions to which it was repeatedly subjected — the South Indian invasions of the earlier period, and the European invasions of the later period. The fact that only a narrow stretch of water, which could be easily crossed, separated Ceylon from India meant that whenever a South Indian kingdom became powerful by subjugating its rivals on the mainland, the temptation to bring Ceylon also under their domain was too great to resist. Similarly, whenever there was a strong and united Sinhala kingdom, there were invasions from the island and interference in the politics of the mainland.

The period in Indian history, when Ceylon faced the greatest threats of invasion, was the time when the Chera, Chola and Pandya princes were at the height of their power in South India. But South Indian invasions seem to have been there from the dawn of Ceylon's history. The story of the first great Sinhala king, Duttugemunu, is the story of the liberation of Ceylon from Tamil domination.



The next serious threat of invasion of Ceylon arose during the beginning of the 11th century, when the Cholas were at the height of their power. At this time, the Cholas managed to conquer and occupy Ceylon for over half a century. The contest for supremacy in South India seems to have raged between the Chera (Kerala), Chola and Pandyan kingdoms. The Sinhalese kingdom became a fourth contestant for power in the region. The Malayasian kingdom of Srivijaya, a great sea power as were the Cholas, seems to have joined this race for power in the 11th and 12th centuries, and to have become a strong ally of Ceylon.

An automatic balance of power policy seems to have evolved between these kingdoms. The most powerful seems to have been kept in check by an alliance of all the others. It was much the same kind of policy that Britain followed in Europe during the Napoleonic era. The Sinhalese kings participated fully in these wars, and in the balance of power game. As a result, Sinhalese armies took part in wars of conquest in South India, and supported one or the other of the rival claimants to supremacy. More than one Pandyan prince was placed on the throne as a result of the intervention of a Sinhalese army. Similarly Ceylon, in turn, was subjected to invasion and conquest from South India.

It is wrong to conceive of these wars, invasions and conquests as between nations. There was no question of nationhood involved at that time. It is a concept that arose only after the development of capitalism. All the princes involved in these wars were feudal princes, most of whom belonged to the same dynasty or were related by marriage. The wars were also largely fought by mercenary troops. Every student of Ceylon history remembers that the army with which Mogollana defeated Kasyappa and seized the throne of Lanka was a mercenary army from India.

These wars between these feudal princes of South India and Ceylon resembled the feudal wars that took place between the feudal nobles of France and England, like the Hundred Years' war. They were not between nation and nation or country and country. The attribution of national sentiments to what were

simply inter-feudal wars was only to serve the latter-day purpose of arousing chauvinism. It is interesting to note that the Mahawansa can find nothing to say against Elara and his rule, and therefore the fact that he was not a Buddhist is used to rouse the people against him—something almost unimaginable in those days.

The fact must be faced that, under feudalism, a Sinhalese feudal king or noble felt closer to a Tamil king or noble than to a Sinhalese serf or peasant. To them, race or language was a matter of least importance. What mattered was one's status in a feudal society. That is why many of the Sinhalese kings married queens from South India. So much so that Parakrama Bahu, who is considered the greatest of the Sinhalese kings, can hardly be called a Sinhalese. His father was a Pandyan prince. Only his mother was a Sinhalese. Even here, her father was not a Sinhalese. The reason why Parakrama Bahu was favoured for the throne was because the Sinhalese at this time followed the matrilineal line of succession. Similarly, Bhuvaneka Bahu VI was a Tamil prince, Prince Sapumal, who conquered Jaffna for Parakrama Bahu VI and married the latter's daughter.

That was also the reason why the last kings of Ceylon were from South India. This was not the result of an invasion, but by a decision of the Kandyan chieftains. The last king of the Sinhalese, Sri Wickrama Rajasinghe—although erroneously called a Tamil—was the son of a princess from Andhra by the Kandyan chieftain Pilimatalawa. The language of his court was Tamil, and it is interesting to note that the Kandyan Convention of 1815 is signed by all the Kandyan nobles who were signatories, excepting Keppetipola, in Tamil. Srimavo Bandaranaike's ancestor, Ratwatte Dissawa, also signed in Tamil. It was not a matter that seemed to have bothered them. Feudal ties united Sinhalese and Tamil nobles against the people, mostly peasants.

It was the British rulers who saw the potentialities in promoting these feudal rivalries to look like national animosity between Sinhalese and Tamil for the purpose of keeping India and Ceylon apart, and for keeping Sinhalese and Tamils divided



in Ceylon. In this, they have had a great measure of success—particularly with the support of local chauvinists on both sides.

Another point that must be made is that just as there were continuous wars between South Indian kings and Sinhalese kings, so were there continual internal wars between Sinhalese claimants to the throne. Raja-rata, Ruhuna and Malaya—desha often had separate rulers—each trying to become the sovereign ruler over Ceylon. Parakrama Bahu I had to fight a costly civil war which nearly ruined the country before he could unify the island under his rule.

One result of these continuous wars was the establishment of a Tamil kingdom in the northern part of the island. Another result was the fusion of South Indian and Ceylonese cultures. When they were not fighting each other, there was a lot of co-existence and co-operation between the South Indians and the Sinhalese. In most periods of the history of pre-colonial Ceylon, South Indians were to be found in the Sinhalese kingdom as purohitas, artisans, mercenary soldiers (during the time of the Polonnaruwa period, there was a regiment called the Velaikkaras (Tamil guards) who acted as bodyguards to the king), traders, etc.—apart from their invasion of the king's bed rooms. All these could not have been without their influence.

It was a different story when Ceylon was faced with a series of invasions by European nations from the beginning of the 16th century. Then it was a different civilisation and a people—whose habits, customs, language and religion differed considerably from the Sinhalese and who were wedded to a more powerful economy, and had the added advantage of the possession of gun powder which, though discovered in China, was now being used to subjugate the peoples of the East.

The European invasions introduced Ceylon to the world of the steam ships, railways, telegraph, telecommunication, the motor car and the aeroplane. It also brought us advanced knowledge, particularly of the sciences.

But it also brought about the destruction of the natural feudal economy then existing in Ceylon, and the introduction of

a colonial economy based on money. It brought us increased exploitation of the people, and the plunder of our natural resources to a degree undreamt of before. The upper classes of our people became slavish imitators of an alien culture, unsuited to their environment and forced on them by the conquerors. A movement to reverse this trend was to take place. But that is modern history.

It is not the intention here to give a detailed account of the history of Ceylon, but only to dwell on the most important aspects, which have had a lasting effect on the future development of the country.

Ceylon history can conveniently be divided into the following periods: (1) The Anuradhapura period, (2) The Polonnaruwa period, (3) the post Polonnaruwa period up to the period of the kingdom of Kotte, (4) the colonial period and (5) the neo-colonial period.

Early Ceylon history is largely a repetition of the stories of different kings and their attempts to unify Ceylon under their rule. We are not interested in the list of these kings, but will only point out some of the more outstanding ones.

The first king who deserves mention is Pandukabhaya, who built the first irrigation tank, and thus initiated a policy which was not only to make Ceylon famous, but was also to be the basis of its prosperity for well over a thousand years. The kings that succeeded Pandukabhaya made Anuradhapura their capital and thus give the name for this period of history.

It was during the reign of Devanampiya Tissa (250 - 210 B.C.) that Buddhism was introduced into Ceylon on the initiative of the Indian Emperor, Asoka, who is reputed to have sent his son, Mahinda, and his daughter, Sanghamitta, as missionaries to Ceylon. It is reported that Mahinda insisted that a Sinhalese priest should be the head of the Buddhist Church in Ceylon. Thus was assured a national church and Buddhists in Ceylon were spared allegiance to a foreign church—a la the Roman Catholic Church.



The king who is regarded as the greatest of this period was Duttugemunu, who liberated Ceylon from Tamil domination. But the king whose reign was to influence the future prosperity of the entire country for decades was Mahasena (276-303 A.D.) who came to be referred to as the Builder of Tanks. As mentioned already, it was during his reign that a big leap forward took place in the science of irrigation engineering, and the first colossal reservoirs were built. He is credited with having built 16 tanks and one great canal. The tanks built by him include Minneriya (4,670 acres), Kavudulu tank, Huruluwewa, Kanavava, Mahakanandaravava near Mihintale, Mahagalkadavala, etc. The Elahara—Minneriya—Kavudulu scheme, which was completed in his reign, is considered to be an epoch-making event in the history of irrigation of Ceylon.

Dhatusena (459-477 A.D.) built the famous Kalawewa. His son Kasyappa (477-495 A.D.) gained fame by his construction of the Sigiriya fortress, where today we find what is perhaps one of the most beautiful heritages of Ceylon's ancient past—the Sigiriya frescoes. He must have been a great patron of arts and the culture of different lands seemed to have flourished at his court.

The Anuradhapura period comes to a close about 1000 A.D. with the Chola conquest of Ceylon and the capture of Mahinda V and his death in captivity in 1029.

There follows over half a century of Chola occupation. The king who liberated Ceylon from Chola occupation and unified Ceylon under his rule was Vijayabahu I (1055-1110). He shifted his capital to Polonnaruwa—probably to be safer from invasions from South India. Hence, the name for this period of Ceylon's history. The Polonnaruwa period probably represents the highest point in the development of ancient Sinhalese civilisation—with Ceylon unified under the greatest of the Sinhalese kings, Parakrama Bahu the Great, and Sinhalese armies successfully invading both South India and Burma.

It is recorded that Parakrama Bahu I built himself a fleet for the invasion of Burma. This must have presupposed the existence of a ship building industry at this time in Ceylon.

We have already pointed out how the irrigation system in Ceylon attained its zenith during the reign of Parakrama Bahu I. It is not necessary to re-state those facts. There is no record of any irrigation work of any note after his death. After his death in 1186, the collapse of the Sinhalese kingdom had started even before another ten years had passed. Before the end of the next century, the great and complex system of irrigation, which is universally regarded as the greatest achievement of the Sinhalese people, passed into ruin.

The cause of the desolation and collapse of the ancient Sinhalese civilisation was due to the collapse of the elaborate social and administrative organisation that was necessary for the construction and maintenance of the complicated irrigation system that made these regions productive and prosperous.

The local chiefs who were responsible for supplying labour to maintain the irrigation system were known as 'kulinas'. They had specialised knowledge and experience that were required to run the public administrations, including the maintenance of irrigation work.

Foreign invasions and internal discord disrupted these activities and the kulinas fled to other areas — bringing about the collapse of the whole system.

The glories of the reign of Parakrama Bahu I seems to have been achieved at the cost of terrific exploitation of the people. He seems to have increased taxes and levied more free service to the state and exacted harder work. Those who failed to pay these levies seem to have been imprisoned, because his successors, Vijayabahu II and Nissankamalla, are said to have freed, according to the Culavansa, "many persons, oppressed by the excessive and illegal punishments inflicted by King Parakrama Bahu the Great, in violation of the customs of former sovereigns...".

The Polonnaruwa period ends, like the Anuradhapura period, with a period of internal civil war culminating in another conquest of Ceylon from abroad. This time it was by Magha from Kalinga. Kalinga is now identified as a region in Malayasia and



not in India. This invasion and occupation seems to have been one of the cruellest Ceylon has experienced

When the princes of Dambadeniya liberated the greater part of Ceylon, they shifted the capital to Dambadeniya, from where it was later shifted to Gampola, Rayigama and then to Kotte, where we find it when the Portuguese arrive on the scene in 1505. It is during this period that there came into existence the Kingdom of Jaffna ruled by the Ariya-chakravartis, and which was suppressed during the reign of Parakrama Bahu VI, but whose existence is again heard of during Portuguese times.

During this time also occurred the remarkable episode of a Sinhalese King of Kotte being taken prisoner by the Chinese and taken in captivity to China. This happened to Vira Alakeswara, king of Kotte, in the year 1411 when the third King Emperor, Cheng Tsu (Yung lo) ruled in China. The feat is credited to an eunuch, Cheng Ho. The captured king was set free in China, and another king, presumably Parakrama Bahu VI appointed to rule Ceylon under Chinese suzerainty. Parakrama Bahu VI, who ruled Ceylon between 1412 and 1467 is said to have visited China in 1416 and 1421. The last recorded tribute sent to China is in 1459.

The reign of Parakrama Bahu VI of Kotte seems to have been the last one of any achievement before the tide of European invasion engulfed Ceylon.

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## CHAPTER II

### The Advent of the Europeans

“There is in our harbour of Colombo a race of people of fair skin and comely withal. They don jackets of iron and hats of iron; they rest not a minute in one place; they walk here and there; they eat hunks of stone and drink blood; they give two or three pieces of gold and silver for one fish or one lime; the report of their cannon is louder than thunder when it bursts on the rock Yughandara. Their cannon balls fly many a gauva and shatter fortresses of granite”.

This was the report conveyed to the King of Kotte, Vira Parakrama Bahu VIII when the Portuguese arrived off Colombo on the 15th November, 1505. Portugal was one of the first European countries to make use of the discovery of the sea route to the East to make its presence felt in Asia. They came in search of spices, and Ceylon was the best source of cinnamon at that time. Their superior naval power and the use of gun powder made them irresistible to the kings then ruling Ceylon. The clue to their success against native armies is contained in the last sentence of the above-quoted report carried to the king of Kotte. “Their cannon balls fly many a gauva and shatter fortresses of granite”.

But, even so, it was not altogether a one-sided affair. The Portuguese encountered stiff resistance and were never able to conquer the whole of the island. Although the then king of Kotte could not resist the request of the Portuguese for permission to build a fort in Colombo, and although a later king of Kotte, Don Juan Dharmapala, after his conversion to Christianity, was to make the king of Portugal his heir in 1580, resistance by other Sinhalese kings and princes continued. In fact, it is this period of history that records some of the most militant wars by the Sinhalese against the foreign European conquerors. The most famous of these exploits were the wars of resistance against the Portuguese carried on by Mayadunne and his son, Rajasingha I. The most famous of these battles, where the Portuguese were decisively defeated by Rajasingha, was the one at Mulleriya, 9 miles from Colombo, in 1559. The other was the famous annihilation of the Portuguese army by Rajasingha II in 1638 at



Gannoruwa, to which place they had retired after sacking Kandy. Only 38 Europeans are reported to have escaped to tell the tale.

The end of the Portuguese rule was not far off. Another European Power, Holland, was now eyeing Ceylon, which was of great strategic importance to these maritime powers, as it lay in the centre of the great trade routes to the East from Europe. Further, in Trincomalee, Ceylon possessed the best natural harbour in the East, from which the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean could be controlled. In 1802, after the British had conquered it, it was described by the younger Pitt in Parliament as "the most valuable colonial possession on the globe . . . giving to our Indian empire a security it had not enjoyed from its first establishment". Trincomalee was to enjoy this strategic importance till the emergence of the air force as the most important arm in recent times. In addition, as has already been pointed out, the fact that Ceylon was one of the world's best suppliers of good quality cinnamon was in itself an attraction. In 1638 Rajasinha II of Kandy signed a treaty with the Dutch. He promised them certain trading rights in return for help to expel the portuguese from Ceylon. The Sinhalese king undoubtedly thought that he could use the contradictions between these two great European rivals to his own country's advantage. But he was mistaken.

The superior maritime power of the Dutch ensured the defeat of the Portuguese. The last stronghold of the Portuguese in Ceylon, Jaffna, fell in 1658. The Dutch quietly slipped into the shoes of the Portuguese—despite all treaty obligations. The Sinhalese king was duped.

The impact of Portuguese rule on Ceylon was great, but not lasting. They brought with them a totally new civilisation, a new religion—Catholicism—and new customs and habits, as the first report of their arrival accurately portrayed it. They opened the way for intercourse with the more advanced West. But their century and a half rule over the greater part of the country (minus the hill country) was a ferocious one. Religious persecution of the worst order, which included the forcible conversion as well as the destruction of the places of worship of other religions, and intense and naked exploitation of the country

—devoid of any of the refinements which later conquerors, particularly the British, were to introduce—marked their rule. They left behind the most reactionary of all religions to be found in Ceylon today—the Catholic Church. Ceylon also inherited from them the most popular names used by its inhabitants today—Perera, Silva, Fernando, etc.

The Dutch occupation of Ceylon, which lasted till 1796, was comparatively uneventful. They ruled only over the maritime provinces. Their main concern was the extraction of as much cinnamon as possible from the island. At that time, most of the cinnamon grew wild in the king's territories. This meant that the Dutch had to be on terms with the king at Kandy. The Dutch concentrated on trade. Apart from cinnamon, they also built up an export trade in arecanuts, elephants, chank shells, etc. It is to be noted that, by this time, rice for local consumption was being imported from India. Pepper and coffee began to be cultivated. The cultivation of coconut in a big way had also started.

The Dutch introduced the Roman Dutch Law to Ceylon and codified the customary law of the Tamil country, called the Thesavalamai. Both remain law to this day. This was their biggest contribution to Ceylon.

In several respects, the Dutch foreshadowed many things that the British were to introduce. They introduced commercial crops, which the British were to develop into an economy. They also introduced the school system, on which the British were to build. If the Portuguese resorted to forcible conversion, the Dutch resorted to the more subtle method of material incentives. All offices under the government were open only to those who had been baptised. The Dutch also showed how to make religion and education effective weapons in their aim of cultural aggression against the people of Ceylon. The British perfected this system. The Church and the school became the centre of imperialist cultural aggression, just as much as the plantation became the centre of imperialist economic aggression.

The British replaced the Dutch in Ceylon in 1796. The defeat of the Dutch was mainly due to the decline of their sea



power in the Atlantic. With the coming of the British, who were the first and only European power to conquer the whole of the island, we come to a period which was to bring about many radical changes in the economy and institutions of the island.

The first twenty-five years of British rule in Ceylon, during which period they ruled only the maritime provinces which had been under the Dutch, were relatively uneventful. From 1796 to 1802, Ceylon was administered by the Madras government of the East India Company. It was in 1802 that it was made a Crown Colony and administered directly from England. An attempt to change the system of collecting revenue brought serious disturbances during the first year of British rule. As a result, there was a return to the former system, as it obtained under the Dutch.

The British Government at home was too pre-occupied with the Napoleonic wars in Europe to have paid much attention to conquering the whole of Ceylon. But, local governors were very ambitious, and the almost continuous rivalries and intrigues of the Kandyan chiefs against their king prodded these ambitions.

Almost coinciding with the arrival in Ceylon of the first British Governor, Frederic North, appointed directly from England, was the accession to the Kandyan Throne in 1797 of the last king of Kandy, Sri Vikrama Rajasinha. He was put on the throne by the Chief Adigar, Pilimatalawa, who is also suspected of having been his father. But Rajasinha did not prove to be such a pliable instrument in the hands of the Chief Adigar. So, the latter started intriguing with the British against the king.

What is referred to as the first Kandyan War took place in 1803, when the British army marched up to Kandy, which had been evacuated by the Kandyans, and installed their puppet, Muttu Swamy, on the throne. But the British were unable to hold Kandy. Handicapped by lack of communications, and badly affected by ill health and the monsoon, the British were forced to withdraw. The Kandyans unleashed guerrilla tactics and intercepted the British Army on the 24th June, 1803, and put it to the sword on the banks of the Mahaveli. It was almost a replica of the disaster that overtook Napoleon on his famous march on Moscow.

Though the Kandyan ward off this first attempt by the British to subjugate them, their final doom was to be brought from within. In 1811, Pilimatalawa paid for his intrigues with his head, and was succeeded as Chief Adigar by Ehelepola. He soon followed in his predecessor's footsteps, and entered into treasonable negotiations with the British through the English civil servant, D'Oyly, who was well versed in Sinhalese. When the king suspected treason, Ehelepola tried to raise his people in the Sabaragamuwa against the king, but failed. He, thereupon, crossed over to the British on the 23rd of May, 1814, and, with his active help, the British launched the second Kandyan War, which led to the conquest of the Kandyan Kingdom.

Thus, treachery and internal dissension played the major role in the downfall of the Kandyan Kingdom in 1815. On the 2nd of March, 1815, Brownrigg received the surrender of the Kandyan chiefs at the Audience Hall of Kandy. A week later was enacted the signing of the farce called the Kandyan Convention. There are those who still try their best to pretend that this Convention was an agreement between equals, by which the Kandyan Chiefs transferred allegiance from Rajasinha to the British King George III. Such pretensions have no legs to stand on. It was a treaty dictated by a conqueror and forced on the conquered.

There is no doubt that the opportunistic Article V of the Convention declared that "Buddhism and the Agama (the religion) of the Devas were inviolable and that the sangha, its places of worship, shrines and ceremonies were to be protected". This was no doubt an attempt to placate local feelings. But it was to be the target of attack by Christian Missionaries. The 1818 rebellion gave the British cause to negate this promise.

It was nothing surprising that the ancient feudal order of the Sinhalese kings had to go under when faced with the superior economic and fire power of the British conquerors. Feudalism did put a feeble resistance, as in the first and second Kandyan wars. But the result was foredoomed. The rebellion of 1815, which is usually referred to as the Wellassa rebellion, spearheaded by one of the Chiefs, who had signed the 1815 Convention, Keppitipola, was the last flicker of this dying flame. The Matale rebel-



lion of 1848, associated with the names of Gongalagoda Banda (David from Peliyagoda) and Purang Appu (both low-country Sinhalese) was a tame affair in comparison, and was put down without the loss of a British life. Today, attempts are made to make Keppetipola out to be a national hero. It is doubtful whether such a claim could be sustained. Keppetipola was not a national hero in the sense we understand it today. He did not fight on behalf of the Sinhalese people against the foreign invaders, because he thought that the latter had deprived the people of their cherished independence. The conception of the people having any rights would have been alien to the Kandyan chiefs. When Keppetipola rebelled, he did so against the usurpation of the traditional powers of the Kandyan chieftains by the British. The chief had thought that the British king or his representative would merely take the place of Sri Wickrama Rajasinha, and had hoped that the rest of the set-up would continue as of old.

In this, they were in for a rude shock. The British meant to be the real rulers. It was this realisation that made a section of the chiefs to rebel. They were fighting for the restoration of the old feudal order. Independence for the people never entered into their calculations. With the suppression of the revolt, the Kandyan feudal class reconciled itself to British over-lordship—although there were to be a few more minor uprisings. Very soon, they became active collaborators with the British conquerors, and joint oppressors of the people. They provided the social base for foreign rule—a role which they have consistently played ever afterwards.

This supine and servile attitude of the decadent Kandyan feudal chiefs, to foreign imperialism has persisted till modern times. When Bandaranaike began his crusade against the U.N.P. in 1951, he did not have the support of any of these feudal chieftains—either from his father's side or from his wife's side. That is why he never trusted them and kept them at arm's length when he formed his government in 1956. If some of them later joined the Bandaranaike band wagon (after 1959) it must have been because they felt reassured about the continuance of the status quo.

The Kandyan provinces were at first ruled as a separate province, but later amalgamated into a united administration of the whole island. One of the first tasks of the British, after the conquest of Kandy, was to link Kandy with Colombo, Trincomalee and Kurunegala by military roads—thus removing the decided advantage that the hill capital had enjoyed, because of its lack of access by good roads. The roads were built by means of compulsory labour 'Rajakariya' or work in the king's service. Ceylon had again been unified—this time under a foreign European power.

With the unification of the island under British rule, a new chapter in Ceylon's history begins. We come to the introduction of the colonial plantation economy with which the economic fate of the country is linked to this day. To understand the fundamental nature of the change that took place, it is essential to trace, at least in a bare outline, the features of the economy that prevailed in Ceylon under the Sinhalese kings for nearly two thousand years.

The economy that prevailed in Ceylon before the European conquest destroyed it can be described as a feudal, natural economy. It was a self-sufficient economy, with money playing, little or no role. People produced all the things they needed and exchanged their surplus for things they lacked. Trade with the outside world existed in articles like gems, pearls, spices, for which Ceylon had always been famous.

A most remarkable description of this kind of a natural economy as it existed in the Kandyan kingdom is given in the famous book on Ceylon by Robert Knox. Knox had been a prisoner in the Kandyan kingdom for over 19 years, between 1660 and 1679, and wrote his book after his escape from the island.

Here is an extract from his book; "All sorts of money is here very scarce. And they frequently buy and sell by exchanging commodities. They have a small traffic among themselves, occasioned from the nature of the Island. For that which one part of the Country affords, will not grow in the other. But in one part or other of this land they have enough to sustain



themselves, I think, without the help of commodities brought from any other country; exchanging one commodity for another; and carrying what they have to other parts to supply themselves with what they want”.

Here is a perfect description of a natural economy under feudalism by an eye witness. There is no doubt that, left to itself, Ceylon would have developed towards capitalism in its own time. But this was not to be. Instead, foreign imperialist invasion smashed the backward and stagnant feudal economy that existed in Ceylon and set up the new, colonial plantation economy. This was basically a money economy. But it was not capitalism in the full sense of the word. The development of local capitalism would not have been in the interests of British imperialism, which wanted Ceylon as a producer of raw materials and a market for its manufactured goods. Therefore, at every turn, it stifled every attempt at capitalist development. What it permitted and nurtured was a colonial economy, which drained vast profits made out of the natural resources of the island to enrich the metropolitan country.

One result of foreign conquest was the final abandonment and decay of the vast irrigation system, which had been the pride of the Sinhalese kings and which had provided the basis for the prosperity of the Sinhalese civilisation when it was at its height. Tanks were left unrepaired to go to ruin, or were sacrificed for the new roads, some of which were built over tank bunds. Gradually, the forest closed over them, and thus they remained till they were reclaimed in this century. Starting from Dutch times, the staple food of the Ceylonese—rice—began to be imported.

As has already been mentioned, the British imperialists introduced the plantation economy into Ceylon. Coffee growing had already begun under the Dutch, but its development as a commercial crop started in British times. Later tea took the place of coffee, when the latter was destroyed by a pest. The planting of rubber also began on a big scale.

These plantations needed large extents of land, and a large labour force. From where did the British get them? Like in

all cases of primitive accumulation of capital, in Ceylon, too, the primitive accumulation of capital (in this case in the form of land) took place through large scale plunder. It was done through the Waste Land Ordinance of 1897 and the Grains Tax of 1878.

When the British came to Ceylon, the Dutch had given a legal system to the maritime provinces over which they ruled. People who owned land had some kind of title deed to prove it. Not so in the Kandyan provinces. Here, all land belonged theoretically to the king. Through his nobles, the king farmed out his lands to the peasants. This tenure was secure and could be transferred only if the peasant lost the confidence of the king. But generally it was held in perpetuity and passed from generation to generation. This was well understood. But there were no title deeds to prove it.

By means of the Waste Lands Ordinance, the British declared all lands to which the people could not prove ownership to belong to the Crown. Even if a certain number of peasants could prove ownership of their paddy fields they tilled, they could prove no ownership to the communal forest and the common pasture where their cattle grazed, and which was so much a part of the village economy and without which the cultivation of the paddy fields was impossible. Large numbers of peasants were thus forced to sell their fields and emigrate. These lands and the forests were declared to be crown property and sold to British planters at ridiculously low prices — sometimes, it is reported, at less than fifty cents per acre. Later, Ceylonese planters, too, were allowed to buy Crown land. If there were any peasants still left in ownership of the land, the Grains Tax looked after them. This was a particularly odious piece of taxation, which was aimed only at the peasant, while it exempted the land owner, temple lands, etc. Unable to pay this onerous tax, a large number of peasants, who were still left, sold their lands and left. Many of them are reported to have died of starvation.

In much the same way, the British also expropriated temple lands under the Temple Lands Registration Ordinance No. 10 of 1856. In effect, this, too, affected the peasants, because these lands had always been given to them on service—tenure. On the Land Commissioners, appointed to administer this Ordinance,



declaring the absence of legal title to the lands, thousands of acres of temple lands were seized by the government.

It is necessary to report that in the task of expropriating the lands from the Kandyan, the British were helped by a section of the feudal chiefs. In the process, these chiefs helped themselves to large tracts of land. This, in fact, is the source of all the present big nindagams. Governor Clifford's cynical comment was, "The speculative work of buying up doubtful titles from villagers was for the most part conducted by their own countrymen".

Thus was the Kandyan peasant robbed of his land by the British conquerors. Though carried out under the semblance of legal fiction, it was nothing but plunder. It is good to have this well in mind. Because, while remembering that the Kandyan peasants had been robbed of their lands, the present-day chauvinist tends to forget who robbed the Kandyan lands. They even tend to substitute the innocent plantation worker of Indian origin, who himself was a victim of imperialist exploitation. In place of the real culprit—the British imperialist, who still owns the greater part of the lands his forefathers robbed.

The evictions of the Kandyan peasants from their lands parallels a similar eviction of the English peasants by their feudal landlords on the eve of the Industrial Revolution, as a result of the change from wheat farming to sheep farming. But, whereas the great majority of the English peasants wandered to the newly established towns to work in the factories that had lately sprung up, and thus became converted into the proletariat, no such luck awaited the evicted Kandyan peasants. The British did not employ them in any big scale in the plantations they opened up. There could probably be two reasons for this. One was that, after the 1818 and 1848 rebellions, the British were suspicious of the Sinhalese. Secondly, they may have preferred immigrant labour, whom they could have at their beck and call, and who would work right throughout the year.

Thus, the evicted Kandyan peasants were left to die a slow death, or, at best, to eke out a miserable existence. That this was so is borne out by the report of the 1935 Land Commission,

which states that, in Ceylon, the peasantry was dying out as a class. In order to stop this process, the Commission recommended that all alienation of Crown lands to private capitalists or to companies be stopped and that, in future, Crown lands be given only to peasants. Thus arose the colonisation schemes of the nineteen thirties. This land policy was followed by all governments up to the 1965 UNP government, when it was reversed, and Crown land again alienated to private capitalists and companies.

From where did the British planters obtain their labour? They looked to South India, whose economy they had already despoiled, and where there was a large body of unemployed people. With the help of Indian kanganyes, these poor workers were inveigled by false promises to come to Ceylon to slave in the plantations—first to open them up, and then to work in them. Hundreds died because of the inhuman methods of transportation. The conditions under which they were forced to live must have been so unhygienic that diseases such as cholera broke out. Things must have been pretty bad, because the Government of India had to intervene and the force of the Government of Ceylon (both governments were British, though separate) to enact certain minimum regulations to govern the housing, health, sanitation and other conditions of living of these immigrant workers. Even the worst exploited need to be kept alive so that they could continue to be exploited.

Thus, it came to pass that the British imperialists, in the middle of the last century, brought a large population of Indian immigrant workers, and dumped them in the midst of the Kandyans, and thereby left for posterity a legacy with continues to be-devil Ceylon's politics to this day. Thus, it must be clearly understood that it was the British imperialists who were responsible for bringing Indian immigrant labour into Ceylon. Further, from the time of the first representative institutions, like the State Council, this policy of importing immigrant Indian labour for the plantations was supported by the Ceylonese bourgeois politicians. Every year, the State Council passed funds to subsidise this immigration. All the bourgeois leaders, from D. S. Senanayake to S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike, acquiesced in it. The latter-day anti-Indian heroes need to be reminded of this!



Along with the Indian worker came the Indian traders, money lenders and the rest of the parasites, who were to exploit Indian and Ceylonese alike. There is a saying in Africa that wherever the British Imperialist went, he took an Indian in his pocket. It certainly seems to have been true in regard to Ceylon. It is to the rapacy and inhuman exploitation by the Indian traders and money-lenders that we must look for the source of much of the anti-Indian feeling which has, unfortunately, been cleverly turned by designing politicians against the workers of Indian origin.

This background to what is now called the Ceylon-Indian problem, or alternatively the problem of the statelessness of several hundred thousand workers of Indian origin must be fully understood, if we are to correctly answer the question: Who are our enemies, who are our friends? It is general ignorance or lack of a proper understanding of this background that has enabled the reactionaries, both foreign and local, to divide the revolutionary ranks in Ceylon by sinister anti-Indian propaganda, and to alienate the plantation workers of Indian origin, who incidentally form a substantial section of Ceylon's working class, from the rest of the Ceylonese population.

This division has cost the revolutionary movement dearly. That is why it is essential to point out that both the workers of Indian origin and the Sinhalese peasants are victims of the same British imperialism, and, therefore, constitute natural allies and not enemies. A lasting solution can proceed only from such an approach.

Thus, as has been seen, the plantation economy introduced by the British developed on the basis of the land (capital) robbed from the Kandyan peasants and the labour of the Indian immigrant worker. The entire economy of the country was built around the business of growing, manufacturing and exporting tea and rubber. Everything else was dependent on it. This has always been the pattern of imperialist exploitation, because the near-complete dependence of the economy on one or two export crops makes it extremely vulnerable to imperialist pressure. The imperialists are able to manipulate the economy according to their will.

Thus, it will be seen that all the foreign banks that established themselves in Ceylon came here to finance the plantation industry out of the profits they had already made out of imperialist exploitation in Asia. The names of some of the banks, like the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank Ltd. even suggest from where their profits had originated. The engineering firms, like Walker & Sons, Commercial Co., originally came here to instal, maintain and keep in repair the machinery needed by the tea and rubber factories. Having come here, they started to import cars as a sideline. The engineering workshops came up to service and repair the cars.

If one looks at the roads, or the railways, the best are those that lead to the plantations—to Kandy, Nuwareliya and Badulla—because it is along these roads and railways that the tea and rubber exports have to move down to Colombo. The reason, why so much foreign aid was granted for the expansion of Colombo harbour was because we have more than doubled tea production during the last three or four decades, and these have to be shipped abroad expeditiously.

A lot of profit was extracted out of the tea and rubber plantations, particularly tea. Vast fortunes were made by the British planters. The original capital that was invested was doubled several times over in many cases. Ceylon tea became world famous. In fact, Ceylon and tea became so synonymous that there was a time when Ceylon was referred to as Lipton's tea garden.

But the opening of the plantations in the hill country, where the tea grew best, had terrible repercussions for Ceylon—other than the exploitation of her resources for the profits of the foreign conqueror. One of the most barbaric acts perpetrated by the British was to cut down the forests that adorned our hill tops to make way for the tea plantations. As any biologist would tell us, forest trees on hill tops perform a useful function. They cool the rain-laden clouds and transform them into rain. Secondly, the strong tree roots prevent the rain water from rushing down all at once, and instead enables it to percolate under the soil and flow down as perennial streams.



The cutting down of the forest trees meant that the rain water would now rush down all at once. Further, as the soil round the tea bushes had to be loosened by forking for purposes of fertilising, the loose sub-soil, which is the most fertile portion of the soil, was washed down by the rain water into the rivers. There is no river in Ceylon which does not run brown or muddy. This is the problem we know as soil erosion. Over a number of years, as a result of the soil that has been washed into the rivers, the river beds started rising. The result was that they could not hold the rain water during heavy showers and this caused flooding. Floods in one season, and draught in another—this was the result of the barbaric policy of the British in cutting down the forests on our hill tops. Even when the ancient irrigation tanks were reclaimed in the nineteen thirties, they could not get sufficient water as of old, because a lot of the rain water was wasted as floods before it reached the tanks. Thus, the British created the main obstacle to Ceylon becoming self-sufficient in food, because it is today accepted that, if there were sufficient irrigation facilities to enable the cultivation of the entirety of the aswadamised lands for both seasons in the year, Ceylon would be well on the way to self-sufficiency.

Along with the intense economic exploitation of the country, the British also resorted to diverse forms of cultural aggression against the people, in order to consolidate their political base. In this connection, the Dutch had already laid the foundation by the establishment of schools, and the encouragement of missionary work. The British built on these.

The attempt to Europeanise the native by means of the English language and the Christian religion was begun. Knowledge of English not only became important but also remunerative. The British also wanted an army of English-educated clerks to man the lower rungs of their administrative services. These were produced through the new schools that were set up. As schools, like in England, were run by missionary organisations, Christianity and the English language marched forward side by side. Very soon, an Academy was started for imparting higher education for the 'natives'.

The English were very far-sighted. They were probably the most experienced of the imperialist powers. Along with the use of brute force whenever they felt it was needed, as in 1818, 1848 or in 1915, they also knew how to sweeten the pill. They used education, especially higher education in British Universities, as an instrument for cultural subversion—to produce a tribe of brown Englishmen who aped the master in language, dress and habit, and whose one ambition was to transform Ceylon into a “little bit of England”. It is reported that, when Governor Maitland left Ceylon in 1811, two sons of Mudaliyar de Saram went with him for higher education in English Universities. The procession had begun.

These University educated men who returned from England were to influence Ceylon's politics for a considerable period, and to fashion it on the model of what they had seen in England. Their influence persists even to this day. For a good part, it was an unimaginative and slavish imitation of alien institutions, which could not possibly thrive in the local setting. It produced such ludicrous sights as the judges of the Supreme Court wearing wigs—disregarding the fact that Ceylon has a hot, tropical climate; or the attempt to transplant the English parliamentary system and the theory of one man—one vote into a society divided almost rigidly on the basis of caste and race.

But some good also resulted, since this inter-change was responsible, in the period after the first world war, for the introduction of the seed of revolutionary Marxism into Ceylon. Higher education in English also meant that the Ceylonese—even though only a small minority—now had access to modern knowledge, particularly scientific learning.

A reaction to this worshipping of everything English was bound to come: and when it did come it was in the form of a movement for Buddhist revival and glorification of the ancient past of the Sinhalese. This movement, which was a pale parallel of the more vigorous literary renaissance movement that had arisen in India (particularly Bengal), was led by men like Migettuwatte Gunananda Thero, Anagarika Dharmapriya, Ananda Coomarasamy and Arumuga Navalar with the help of foreign theosophites,



like Oldcott and Annie Besant. Although we cannot read too much into the activities of these men and women, their work had a progressive content inasmuch as any opposition to the religion associated with the conquerors was bound to rouse anti-imperialist and nationalistic feelings.

Inasmuch as the foreign invaders had carried out their policy of cultural aggression by means of the school and the church, those connected with the movement for a Buddhist revival used the same media for the counter-attack. Institutions such as the Buddhist Theosophical Society and the Hindu Board of Education were formed, and these organisations started to compete with the Christian missionaries by establishing Buddhist and Hindu schools, and to impart an education, which was necessarily tinged with nationalism and thus laid the basis for anti-imperialism. It could thus be said that in the movement for the revival of Buddhism and Hinduism were seen the early anti-imperialist yearnings of the people and a desire to assert their national pride.

At the same time or along with the movement for Buddhist revival, there also arose the temperance movement in Ceylon—a movement, which, in the eyes of the British, had an anti-British political slant. The British government had established a monopoly of trade in arrack, and in order to increase their revenue, the right to sell arrack was farmed out to men who established taverns in every village of any size throughout the interior. The purpose sought to be achieved seems to have been the same as that which was sought by the forcible introduction of opium into China by the British. In any event, some of those who made big money through arrack renting emerged to lead the temperance movement, having moved their capital into the plantation industry. Some of these men were to provide the bourgeois leadership for Ceylon in the period after the first world war.

At the same time as when the British were carrying out their policy of cultural aggression through school and church, they were also busy introducing into the colony political reforms, which were aimed at winning the consent of the slaves to their slavery. The British knew the art of exploitation with refine-

ment—unlike the Portuguese. They set about the task of drawing the Ceylonese into the work of assisting the British in their administration of the island. Retaining real power in their hands, they gave, little by little, the illusion of power to the “natives”. For this purpose, various reforms were introduced from time to time. The process was set going with the establishment of a legislative council and an executive council on the recommendations of the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission, whose report was published in 1831-32. First, the inclusion of unofficial members, later the introduction of the principle of elected representatives, then an unofficial majority and so to universal franchise, and the executive committee system under the Donoughmore constitution—these were some of the semblances of power which the British conceded to the Ceylonese, while they themselves held tight to their reign over the armed forces, public administration and finance—safeguarded by the veto power of the British Governor.

The British had no difficulty in finding able men on the Ceylon side, who were willing to play the game according to the British rules. Men like E. W. Perera, James Pieris, Ponnampalam Ramanathan and Ponnampalam Arunachalam alternatively pleaded and demanded more and more reforms. They sent regular petitions and went on successive deputations to Whitehall, and formed associations like the Reforms League and, ultimately, the Ceylon National Congress to keep alive their agitation.

They were all able bourgeois reformists, who wanted a better deal for the Ceylonese within the existing framework. They never raised the question of independence from British imperialism. In this sense, it would be wrong to think of them as men who fought for the freedom of the country. Their aspirations seldom went beyond those stated by E. W. Perera in 1907 in the “Twentieth Century Impressions of Ceylon”: “An eminently loyal people, deeply sensible of the benefit of British rule, the Ceylonese are aspiring to win the full measure of British citizenship. A freer constitution, flood relief works, abolition of the poll tax, systematic colonisation from the crowded western and southern districts to the restored tank regions, a larger educational vote and a wider field for the people of the country in the higher branches of the public service, are some of the



reforms which have been eagerly awaited and are urgently needed, and which alone will crown the splendid monument of administration, which a Century of British statesmanship has raised in Ceylon”.

In contrast to the revolutionary nature of the movement for national independence which grew in the neighbouring continent of India, one peculiarity of the movement in Ceylon was that it was entirely reformist in character, and confined to the narrow walls of petition writing and going on deputations. No bourgeois reformist leader—from E. W. Perera to D. S. Senanayake and S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike—ever raised the demand for national independence. The cry of national independence was first raised in Ceylon by the left movement.

The first world war had very little impact on Ceylon, except for the excitement caused by the report of the arrival of the German gun boat, Emden, off the coast of Ceylon. The most important event of this period for Ceylon was the tragic racial riots of 1915. The immediate provocation for the riots was some religious ill-feeling between the Buddhists and the Coast Moors in the Kandy-Gampola area.

The dispute arose over the refusal of the Moors to permit a Buddhist perehera to go past their mosque. The Buddhists invoked the rights allegedly protected for them by the Kendyan Convention. The District Judge of Kandy, Dr. Paul E. Pieris, upheld the plea of the Buddhists. But his decision was reversed by the Supreme Court consisting of two English Judges. Thus, the fuse was ignited. But the British officials in Ceylon suspected the hand of the newly emerged Buddhist revival and temperance movement, which had earned the odium of being anti-government. They panicked and resorted to the most extreme measures. The Country was placed under martial law for three months, and brute force in the form of Punjabi soldiers was used against the Sinhalese. The number of those killed has never been estimated. Several suffered imprisonment for varying periods.

The Governor was recalled. But the sufferings of the Sinhalese had helped to deepen the anti-imperialist feelings of

the people, as well as their hatred for the foreign rulers. This, in turn, spurred forward the movement for constitutional reform. But the immediate beneficiaries were some of the leaders, who had found themselves in jail during the riots. Before two decades could pass, they found themselves as political leaders of Ceylon—of course, as loyal servitors of the very imperialism that had sent them to jail!

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## CHAPTER III

### THE FIRST WORLD WAR AND AFTER

The years following the first world war brought many changes to the world, and in particular to Asia, which had been under foreign imperialist domination during the previous two centuries or more. The salvoes of the Great October Revolution found their echo in many countries of Asia. The flames of revolution were lit in that great country of China, the seat of one of the oldest civilisations in the world, and the most populous country in the world. Indonesia rose in abortive revolt against Dutch domination. The movement for "poorna swaraj" or full independence, gained impetus in India. Ceylon was not left unaffected.

Men and organisations rose up to champion the cause of labour. Ponnampalam Arunachalam, C. H. Z. Fernando and Martinus Perera had formed the Workers' Welfare League in 1919. The Ceylon Workers' Federation was founded in 1920. But their influence was restricted. Among the pioneers of the labour movement of this time, the best known are A. E. Goonasinghe and Natesa Iyer. The former championed the cause of the urban workers, while the latter took up the cause of the plantation workers. The two worked together for a time. A. E. Goonasinghe, Victor Corea and others had formed the Ceylon Labour Union in September, 1922. The first general strike, in which 20,000 workers were involved in Ceylon, took place in 1923. It was this strike that catapulted Goonasinghe into position as a Labour Leader.

A. E. Goonasinghe, a former school teacher, faithfully imitating British institutions, formed his All Ceylon Trade Union Congress and its correlary, the Labour Party, on the lines of the British Trades Union Congress and the British Labour Party, whose sessions he attended, dressed in a top hat and tails. It was the case of a slave imitating his master to perfection. Despite the reformism and the bourgeois limits of his movement (he was to end up in the lap of the U. N. P. and as the greatest friend of the employers) Goonasinghe in his day was considered by the British as a dangerous Bolshevik!

The excesses of the British bureaucracy in Ceylon during the 1915 riots had spurred the reforms movement on, although it continued to keep strictly within the bourgeois reformist limits. This movement also did not enjoy popular support, or evoke mass participation as in India, where mass civil disobedience movements ensured popular backing to the demand for independence. The reason for this difference is to be found in the fact that, unlike in India, in Ceylon a national bourgeoisie wanting to replace imperialism had not yet been born.

In 1927, the British Government appointed the Donoughmore Commission to report on the reforms needed in Ceylon. The importance of the Donoughmore Constitution is the fact that it granted adult franchise to Ceylon at a time when the women of some of the advanced European countries, like France and Switzerland, did not even have the vote. Nor had the Ceylonese asked for it, with the exception of A. E. Goonesinghe and his Labour Party.

Why did the British grant adult franchise to Ceylon at this stage—at a time when it was a British colony? To suggest altruistic motives to the British imperialists (Labour or Conservative) is to beg the question. Some people suggest that this grant of adult franchise was a progressive step and paved the way for the other reforms that followed. This is a doubtful claim.

Elections and adult franchise had already been used by the British bourgeoisie to subvert the British working class movement and to deflect it from the path of revolution in which direction it once seemed to be developing during the days of the famous Chartist movement. This weapon was now used in Ceylon to divide and distract the unity of the growing and potentially powerful anti-imperialist movement, to blunt the fighting spirit of the masses, to spread the illusion about the possibility of peaceful transition through parliament, and to distract the attention of the people from the real seats of power, which were the armed forces. It was an attempt to substitute the struggle by words for the struggle by arms.

When one looks back over the past forty years, when elections in Ceylon were based on adult franchise, one must



concede that the British succeeded beyond their hopes. It is not an accident that it is with the Donoughmore era that communal politics begins to rear its ugly head. Even the "venerable knight" Ponnambalam Ramanathan, who had risked the perils of the torpedo-infested seas in an attempt to plead before the British authorities in London on behalf of the Sinhalese leaders jailed during the 1915 Martial Law, and who had twice, with the support of the Sinhalese, defeated Sir Marcus Fernando and S. W. Jayawardene respectively in the elections to the Ceylonese Educated seat in the Legislative Council, which had a majority of Sinhalese voters, now resigned from the National Congress, which he and his brother Arunachalam had helped to found. The Sinhalese and Tamil leaders could not agree about how to divide the spoils of office that was being granted to them by a cunning imperialist power. The British government had thrown an apple of discord among the Ceylonese leaders.

The precise dispute arose over the request of the Ceylon Tamil leaders for a separate Tamil seat in the Western Province. The Sinhalese leaders rejected this on the ground that it was a communal demand. They themselves put forward the demand for territorial representation, which they claimed was non-communal. In fact, both approaches were communal in different degrees. For the majority, territorial representation would result in a larger number of members of their race being returned. To the minorities, communal representation would result in more members of their race being elected. It is impossible to judge the respective merits of these two standpoints. The only thing that one can say is that it was in the interests of both the majority and the minority to have come to terms and present a united front against their common enemy and oppressor. This elementary wisdom, however, was lacking. It was the British imperialist who therefore triumphed. Ceylonese fought Ceylonese on the basis of caste, race and religion, while the foreign imperialist lorded it over all. All the while, imperialist control over Ceylon's economy continued in one form or another—direct or indirect.

But the Donoughmore Constitution was not accepted without a protest. Perhaps influenced by the more revolutionary national

movement that was sweeping the neighbouring sub-continent, a movement arose, which criticised the Donoughmore Constitution as falling far short of real freedom. An organisation called the Youth Congress came into being, and called for the boycott of the elections scheduled under the New Constitution. Although support had been promised from the South also, the movement was successful only in the Northern Province. Elections to all the four seats for the Northern Province were boycotted, and the Northern Province Tamils remained unrepresented in the first State Council for four years. Some people have suggested that the measure of success achieved by the Youth Congress in organising the boycott of the elections in the North was due to the support it received from the more conservative elements for an entirely different reason, namely the rejection by the Donoughmore Commission of the demand for communal representation for the Tamils. There could be a measure of truth in this.

For this time, the Youth Congress was a progressive, anti-imperialist and non-communal organisation, although it had support only in one part of the country. But it was soon to be submerged in the Communal politics let loose in the North by G. G. Ponnampalam and his All Ceylon Tamil Congress. The emergence of communalism in Ceylon's politics was due, as was already pointed out, to the inability of the Sinhalese and Tamil leaders to agree among themselves about how to share the illusion of power that the British were willing to transfer to them. The British skilfully used this situation by supporting one side on one occasion, and the other at another, and managed to keep the Ceylonese divided to the end.

The Donoughmore Constitution had provided for a State Council and an executive committee system, under which members had more say in matters of legislation and the Ministers were untrammelled by inhibitions such as Cabinet collective responsibility. The leader of the Board of Ministers did not enjoy the almost autocratic powers of a Prime Minister with a Cabinet. But the constitution was careful to safeguard British interests by including in the Board of Ministers three non-elected Officers of State—the Financial Secretary, the Legal Secretary and the Chief Secretary - who were promptly dubbed by E. W. Perera as the



Three Policemen in Plain Clothes. They were irremovable, and responsible only to the Governor who appointed them. The inevitable conflict ensued between the nominated Officers of State and the elected Ministers.

The British had made it clear that any consideration of further reforms would be conditional on the Board of Ministers reaching unanimity about the proposed reforms. Thus, the British put a premium on communal unity and thereby worsened the situation. D. S. Senanayake, the most astute as well as the most reactionary of the Sinhalese bourgeois leaders, sought to achieve unanimity not on the basis of unity between the leaders of the Sinhalese and the Tamils, but by producing an All-Sinhala Board of Ministers. Ironically, the man who helped him by producing a formula to ensure the election of an All-Sinhala Board of Ministers after the elections to the second State Council in 1936, was a Tamil, the Mathematics Professor at the University College, Colombo—the controversial C. Suntheralingam, then a friend and adviser to Senanayake!

The setting up of an All-Sinhala Board of Ministers only further sharpened communal differences. The formation of the Tamil Congress under G. G. Ponnambalam and his strident campaign for fifty-fifty or balanced representation, as he called it, was paralleled by the formation in the South of the Sinhalese Mahasabha under S. W. R. D. Bandaranayake.

Sinhala communalism fed on Tamil communalism and vice-versa. The plea of Bandaranayake was that the unity of the Sinhalese must first be achieved, before the unity of all the races could be brought about. This plea was repeated by R. G. Senanayake later on. But the question that must be answered is; Unity for what purpose? If it was to oust the foreign conqueror, then it must be the unity of all the conquered races—not just one! If it was to be directed against the Tamils, then the formation of the Sinhala Maha Sabha was justified. But if it were the latter then it was a communal move, which detracted from the common anti-imperialist objective. This tendency to identify the Sinhalese with the Ceylonese nation and to be unmindful of the legitimate rights of racial and linguistic minorities has been a

common weakness of all bourgeois Sinhalese political leaders. In fact, the only non-communal parties were the left parties. But even the L. S. S. P. and the Keuneman revisionist clique ceased to be non-communal after 1964, and more particularly from 1970. The possibility of any of these parties - U. N. P., S. L. F. P., L. S. S. P., M. E. P., or the Keuneman revisionist clique ever winning a seat in the Tamil areas is as remote as a Ceylonese setting foot on the moon. There can be no question but that the communal direction taken by Ceylon politics was tragic in the extreme. Each of the warring factions placed more faith in the imperialist master than on each other. It was again a question of the success of the imperialist policy of divide and rule. It is significant that the British-owned 'Times of Ceylon' at that time fully backed G. G. Ponnampalam and his cry of fifty-fifty. Reduced to simple terms, this demand meant that electorates should be so delimited that in a Council of 100 members, 50 members would be Sinhalese while the balance 50 should be distributed between the minorities (25 to the Ceylon Tamils, and the balance to the other minorities). The Tamil minority was to emerge as losers in this tragic conflict. Having held out all sorts of promises to the Tamil minority, ultimately - under a changed set of circumstances prevailing at the end of the second world war - the British imperialists decided to come to terms with the Sinhalese majority - leaving the Tamils out in the cold. How much better would it have been for the Tamil leaders to have joined forces with their Sinhalese brethren in a common demand to the imperialist master! But that would have been statesmanship of a stature to which the bourgeoisie leadership of neither community was equal. The names of G. G. Ponnampalam and his later day disciple S. J. V. Chelvanayagam would go down in history as two men who misled the Tamils into political wilderness, where they are still groping. This is not to absolve the communal leaders among the Sinhalese. But being a minority, and having more to lose, the Tamil leadership should have been more responsible and far-seeing.

Meanwhile, another communal factor had entered the scene. The world economic crisis of 1929-31 had its repercussion in Ceylon, too. Rubber prices slumped to their lowest. Many fortunes were lost. And for the first time, unemployment among



the Sinhalese became a serious problem. The unemployed Sinhalese looked with envy at the Indian workers in the plantations, who were guaranteed full employment. A. E. Goonesinghe was the first man who saw the explosive potentialities of exploiting this situation. He set on foot a wave of anti-Indian agitation, which was to assume tidal proportions. He demanded the repatriation of Indian workers. What was to become known as the Ceylon-Indian problem had arrived. The Second State Council debated and passed a resolution, calling for the repatriation of a section of the Indian workers employed in Ceylon. It is interesting to note that the Samasamajist twins in the State Council at that time, N. M. Perera and Philip Gunawardene, voted for this resolution despite their Party's official position that the working class had no national boundaries. Anti-Indianism had become an important factor in Ceylon's politics. It was to be fashioned by D. S. Senanayake in the post-war period into a convenient stick to beat the left movement.

When the Indian National Congress agreed to form a government on the eve of the second world war, Pandit Nehru came to Ceylon in 1940 to try to settle the Ceylon-Indian question. But he failed. Before leaving Ceylon, Nehru advised the Indian community in Ceylon to organise themselves into the Ceylon-Indian Congress - a retrograde and most deplorable piece of advice. Had the workers of Indian origin not thus been misled into forming separate organisations of their own, and thus cutting themselves away from the main stream of the left and progressive movement of Ceylon, they would not have played into Senanayake's hands and his attempts to divide and isolate them from the Sinhalese workers and peasants. It was a tragedy of whose extent and magnitude no proper assessment has been made.

The importance of the Ceylon-Indian problem does not spring from the fact that it involves over a million people of Indian origin, but from the fact that the overwhelming number of these people constitute the bulk of Ceylon's working class, and moreover, those working in the industry that has been responsible for the prosperity of modern Ceylon. Even though the left movement did not, D. S. Senanayake correctly saw this as a

class question, and not as a national question. He understood that these plantation workers of Indian origin were a potentially revolutionary force, and, therefore, his enemies.

His understanding was confirmed when, at the 1947 parliamentary elections, these workers, through their organisation, the Ceylon Indian Congress, returned seven members of their own, who stayed anti-U.N.P. and also helped to victory a large number of anti-U.N.P. candidates, especially left candidates, in other constituencies. The die was cast when, during the by-election at Kandy, which took place immediately after the 1947 general elections, the marginal Indian vote brought about the defeat of the U.N.P. candidate, and the victory of Mr. T. B. Illangaratne. D. S. Senanayake swore that it should never happen again.

In 1948, he introduced the Citizenship Acts, which prescribed rigorous tests for all those people of Indian and Pakistani origin, who wanted to become Ceylon citizens. The tests were so designed that only a few could pass. At the same time, it was decreed that only citizens shall have the right to vote. At one fell blow, the workers of Indian origin lost both their citizenship and their right to vote, and were relegated to the category of stateless. They were citizens neither of India nor of Ceylon. The Ceylon Indian Congress was incapable of organising any effective protest beyond a token satyagraha. To their eternal shame, the left movement stood paralysed. D. S. Senanayake had scored a bloodless victory for reaction.

To go back a little. The period between the two wars saw the spread of Marxist ideas in Ceylon. These were brought to Ceylon by students, who had studied in British Universities, and had there come into contact with Marxism following the impetus given to it as a result of the October Revolution in Russia. Under the impetus of these ideas was started the Suriya Mal movement in 1934. This brought together a loose conglomeration of nationalists, anti-imperialists, socialists and communists. The sale of poppies on Armistice Day, November 11th, was an open pro-imperialist activity. Therefore, those associated with the Suriya Mal movement organised a campaign to counter this by selling suriya mals on the same day. These sales continued yearly right up to the first years of the second world war.



In the meanwhile, the year 1935 saw the formation of the Lanka Samasamaja Party (LSSP), the first left party to be organised in Ceylon. Most of the leaders were men who had returned from abroad after their university education. All of them held advanced radical views. Many claimed to have embraced Marxism while abroad. Some of them were hidden Trotskyites. There seems to be no doubt that there was a hidden hard core of Trotskyists inside the leadership. This probably accounts for the fact that they did not form themselves into a communist party.

However, at the beginning, the LSSP worked closely with the Communist Parties of Great Britain and that of India. The latter Party lent some of its Tamil cadres for work among the Tamil Plantation workers in Ceylon. The LSSP also supported the Soviet Union and the speeches of its first lawyer-President, Colvin R. de Silva, during the first few years were full of admiration for the U. S. S. R. During this time, the L.S.S.P. carried on mass propaganda for anti-imperialist and socialist ideas. Two of its leaders, N. M. Perera and Philip Gunawardene, had got themselves elected to the 2nd State Council.

But their sectarianism was exhibited in their call, even while under the British yoke, for a workers' and peasants' government and in their condemnation of all trade union work as reformist. In fact, most of these gentlemen were not revolutionaries at all, as they claimed, but petty-bourgeois radicals. Their sectarian and ultra left slogans were in reality a reaction to the slavish and absolutely pro-imperialist mentality exhibited by the Ceylonese bourgeois politicians at that time under the leadership of D. B. Jayatileke and D. S. Senanayake. They filled the vacuum caused in Ceylon by the absence of an anti-imperialist section of the bourgeoisie. They were the Nehrus and Boses of Ceylon. They were in tune with the left wing of the Indian National Congress. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya, one of the firebrands of the left wing of the Indian National Congress, toured Ceylon as a guest of the LSSP. Even Nehru was hosted by the LSSP at a public meeting at the Galle Face, when he came to Ceylon in 1940. Today, in retrospect, when the LSSP has exposed itself, it is easy to understand the role of the LSSP leaders. They were not Marxist revolutionaries. They were petty

bourgeois radicals masquerading as revolutionaries. But, at the same time, they succeeded in fooling a lot of people. The first split in the LSSP occurred in 1939-40 at the time of the Soviet-Finnish war. The anti-Soviet hysteria unleashed by the imperialists and reactionaries at that time brought out the hidden Trotskyism of the LSSP leadership. They rail-roaded through the Central Committee a resolution condemning the Third Communist International and the Soviet Union. All those who opposed this move were expelled from the party on various pretexts,

It is necessary to point out that this split was foisted on artificial grounds, and had nothing to do with policies or tactics concerning the movement in Ceylon. From this time, the LSSP openly announced its allegiance to the counter-revolutionary philosophy of Trotskyism. It is necessary to put on record here that all groups of Trotskyists that appeared in Ceylon had a counter-revolutionary end. The so-called father of Trotskyism in Ceylon, Philip Gunawardene, ended his political life in the lap of the U.N.P. The main body of Trotskyites, under the leadership of N. M. Perera, surrendered to the national bourgeoisie, and became open traitors to the working class and turned their backs on everything revolutionary. The two M. P.s from the group that split from the LSSP in 1964—Samarakoddy and Merryl Fernando—voted with the U. N. P. in December 1964, to bring down the coalition government, and thus paved the way for the return of the UNP in 1965. The present accredited representative of the Fourth International, Bala Tampoe, accepted an American Embassy-sponsored Asia Foundation Scholarship to visit the U.S.A., while simultaneously his wife went on an Ebert Foundation scholarship to West Germany.

The expelled communists first formed themselves into the United Socialist Party, which in 1943 became the Ceylon Communist Party. Although differing in class origin from the leadership of the LSSP, who were mostly wealthy men from upper middle classes, the leadership of the CP was no more revolutionary. Its top leadership had come to Marxism through the Communist Party of Great Britain, which they had joined during their university days in England. The Communist Party of Great Britain was revisionist even before Khrushchov. The result was that



these communists brought over to Ceylon the revisionist policies and styles of work, which they had learned from the British "comrades".

The C. P. reacted to the left sectarian Trotskyism of the LSSP by taking up right-wing reformist positions that landed them in many ridiculous positions. But, before long, both the LSSP and the CP had degenerated into parliamentary appendages of the S. L. F. P. It is true that, when the LSSP first contested the elections to the State Council, it proclaimed its intention to use the Council as a platform to popularise their policies. But these good intentions were relegated to cold storage as a result of the corruption engendered by several decades of bourgeois parliamentary politics by the leaders of these two parties. The 1956 landslide parliamentary victory of Mr. Bandaranayake put paid to whatever revolutionary potential that might have remained. The transformation of both parties into tame parliamentary parties was complete. Both parties also degenerated to the level of endorsing and taking over the communal slogans (e.g. the masala vadai line of 1965 of the right wing of the SLFP). In an attempt to fool both god and man, the leaders of these parties now started taking part in religious observances and delighted in being photographed while offering flowers to statues of Lord Buddha.

It is not the intention of this booklet to detail the various splits as well as the twists and turns of policies that occurred inside these parties. That deserves separate attention. But it is necessary to note here that in 1964, the revolutionary elements inside the CP re-formed themselves as the Ceylon Communist Party based on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, while the Keuneman clique of revisionists joined the LSSP in surrendering to the SLFP and forming a United Front of these three parties.

The Second World War, unlike the first one, had more direct consequences for Ceylon. In the first place, with the entry of Japan into the war, Ceylon moved right into the theatre of war operations. Although it was lucky to escape with only a single Japanese air attack, it became the headquarters for Mountbatten's South East Asian Command, which was located in Kandy. The stationing of Commonwealth troops in Ceylon, and the vast imperial military expenditure in connection with the war effort

directed from the island, produced an artificial prosperity. Unemployment disappeared. Most people found themselves a job—mostly connected with the war. Tea and rubber fetched good prices, particularly the latter. So much so that rubber was slaughter-tapped in the interests of the war and immediate profits. But Ceylon did not gain the real value for the rubber it produced. Britain bought most of it at a fixed price, which was credited to our account in London against future payment. This was to be known as the Sterling balances, which D. S. Senanayake was to foolishly run down in a short time against import of food items.

The Board of Ministers co-operated loyally with the British government. The LSSP and the United Socialist Party (predecessor to the C. P.) were banned, and their leaders detained or prosecuted in 1941. The LSSP leaders broke jail in 1942, and escaped to India—presumably to lead the revolution there. They dissolved the LSSP, and with some Trotskyite elements in India, formed the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India, Burma and Ceylon—a highly ambitious title, no doubt, but one which displays their divorce from reality. They were arrested in India, and were brought back to Ceylon and released after the end of the war, when they resurrected the LSSP. While the LSSP was resurrected under the leadership of Philip Gunawardene and N. M. Perera, the Bolshevik-Leninist Party continued to function under the leadership of Colvin R. de Silva and Leslie Gunawardene. A re-union was effected in 1951, but Philip Gunawardene once again split to form the VLSSP. In the meantime, the communists used the favourable situation created by the entry of the Soviet Union into the war, and its successes against Hitler Germany to emerge as the communist Party in 1943.

The war years also saw the emergence of a strong trade union movement in Ceylon. This was, on the one hand, due to the advantageous position in which labour found itself as a result of a labour shortage experienced during these years, and, on the other, because of the leadership given by the left parties. The leading position, which A. E. Goonesinghe held in the trade union field, was effectively challenged and overthrown and Goonesinghe himself was exposed as a class collaborator of the worst kind.



The communists organised the Ceylon Trade Union Federation in 1940. It was the main force among the urban workers during the war years. The LSSP leaders, after their release at the end of the war, took over the Ceylon Federation of Labour, and developed it as their trade union centre in opposition to the CTUF. In doing so, they turned their backs on the original Samasamajist theory about the role of the trade unions.

In the plantations, the action of the Madras Government on the advice of Nehru, following his abortive attempt to settle the Ceylon-Indian problem during 1939-40, in banning all emigration of Indian labour to Ceylon, gave a filip to the organisation of plantation labour into trade unions, as the planters could not now repatriate recalcitrant labour to India, and bring fresh labour at their will, as of old. The Indian Federation of Labour of Natesa Iyer, and the Ceylon Indian Congress Labour Union were the main contestants. The latter, which later became the Ceylon Workers Congress, won the day. But it, too, suffered a split, and a section broke off to form the Democratic Workers' Congress. The divisions were on the basis of personalities, and not because of any recognisable policy differences. The leadership of both groups were bourgeois, and had no solutions to the problems affecting the plantation workers, both as a class, and as a national group.

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## CHAPTER IV

### Emergence of Neo-Colonialism

Meanwhile, in pursuit of further reforms, the second State Council, whose life had been prolonged because of the war, adopted a reforms resolution moved by Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranayake, calling for transfer of still greater measure of freedom. In retrospect, it is interesting to note that this resolution called for the replacement of English as a State language by both Sinhalese and Tamil.

The British, however, appointed the Soulbury Commission to inquire into the demands for more reform. D. S. Senanayake officially boycotted the commission, but gave the Commissioners his views in private. The recommendations made by the Soulbury Commission must be viewed in the context of the changed conditions that had come into existence at the end of the second world war, which had so radically changed the history of the world. The defeat of German, Italian and Japanese fascism, and the emergence of the socialist Soviet Union as a great power, had given tremendous encouragement to the national liberation movements in Asia. British imperialism realised that it could no longer continue to rule its colonies in the old way. It decided to arrive at a compromise with the native bourgeoisie in its colonies who had also begun to be alarmed that, if the national liberation movements were to be allowed to develop in too revolutionary a way, it, too, would be swept away along with imperialism. Thus was laid the basis for a compromise between imperialism and the native bourgeoisie for the joint exploitation of the people, with the native bourgeoisie functioning as junior partners of imperialism. British imperialism agreed to transfer the semblance of power in return for the guarantee of its economic investments in the colonies.

The same old colonial exploitation, with slight modifications, continued. In some cases, it was even strengthened. But, now, the imperialists remained in the background. They took the back seat: while the native bourgeoisie was given the front driving seat. The puppets that danced on the local stage were natives, but the invisible strings that manipulated the puppets were pulled from Whitehall or Washington. This is the method that U.S.



Imperialism had already perfected in its dealings with the Latin American countries. The latter were nominally independent countries, and were even members of the UNO. But they were all under the firm control of the almighty dollar and obeyed its dictates. This is the classical form of economic domination, which came to be known as neo-colonialism. This is the sham commodity that was passed off as independence in 1948 to countries like India, Burma and Ceylon. In 1948, Ceylon passed from colonial to neo-colonial rule.

In order to work the parliamentary system of government granted by the Soulbury Constitution, D. S. Senanayake united all the bourgeois parties—the National Congress, the Sinhala Maha Sabha, the Muslim League (all except the Tamil Congress)—to form a new party, the United National Party, under his leadership, in 1947. The subsequent political history of Ceylon can be likened to a game of musical chairs between the Senanayake and the Bandaranayake families. During the first nine years, from 1947 to 1956, the country was governed by the Senanayake clan (father, son and nephew). For the next nine years, from 1956 to 1965, it was the turn of the Bandaranayake family (husband and wife). From 1965 to 1970, for another five years, the Senanayakes (son) were in the saddle. In 1970, the pendulum had swung back to the Bandaranayakes (wife).

It is not suggested that there was no difference between the Senanayakes and the Bandaranayakes or between the UNP and the SLFP. There was a difference, but it was not fundamental enough to make a difference in the solution of the basic problems of the people. The same fundamental problems remain unsolved, and further aggravated after 23 years of bourgeois parliamentary rule by the Senanayakes and the Bandaranayakes. The same remedies, couched in different words, had been tried by both sides, with the same lack of success, while the lot of the common man has continued to deteriorate.

The UNP represents the comprador bourgeoisie, which is pro-imperialist, pro-western and anti-national. Its leaders imitated the West in language, dress, habits and culture. They stood for the continued imperialist domination of our economy. The SLFP

represented Ceylon's bourgeoisie, which developed in Ceylon as a separate class during the first decade after the second world war, due to the accumulation of capital in Ceylonese hands as a result of business undertaken during and after the war. The national bourgeoisie desired to replace imperialism and develop national capitalism. To that extent, it had a progressive outlook. But, as a class, it, too, was bourgeois and exhibited all the inhibitions that flow from its class character. This is the third time that the national bourgeoisie has tasted power, and the inevitable development has taken place within its ranks. Sections of them have graduated to the status of comprador bourgeoisie, which is no longer to be found exclusively inside the ranks of the UNP. Beside this, there has also grown another group of capitalists as a result of the multiplication of the State Corporations—a class of capitalists, who have become capitalistic without their own capital. These are the new State Corporation bosses, who have made good on their fat salaries, on corruption and graft, by selling trade licences, earning commissions, etc. They all support the government in power, because on that depends their very existence. For this reason, it is completely unscientific to call the SLFP a socialist party in the sense that it stands for the abolition of capitalism. Although both sides keep talking of socialism in order to fool the people, there is a common measure of agreement between the UNP and the SLFP (and now the United Front) about the continuation of the capitalist system. Without such a common understanding on fundamental matters, it is impossible to work the bourgeois parliamentary system.

With this general understanding, let us pause to take a closer look at political developments since the first parliamentary elections in 1947. That was the year of the famous general strike of May—June, led by the C. P. and the LSSP. The Trade Unions that officially led it through a joint committee were the Ceylon Trade Union Federation (led by the C. P.), the Ceylon Federation of Labour (led by the LSSP) and the Government Workers Trade Union Federation (then led jointly by the CP and the LSSP). At its height nearly 50,000 employees took part in the strike. Kandasamy, a government clerk, was shot dead during a demonstration. That strike represented a high water mark in the history of the revolutionary movement, surpassed only by the Hartal of 1953.



But it was put down by brute force at the command of the State, ably aided by a lying bourgeois press. Hundreds of workers in all sectors were dismissed from their jobs by a revengeful government and the capitalist class.

This strike was to be used as a bargaining weapon by D. S. Sananayake and Oliver Goonetilleke in their negotiations at Whitehall during the same year. They frightened the British imperialists by pointing to the general strike as a portent of the things to come—the red alternative—if the reforms they asked for were not granted, and power transferred to them.

But there was no doubt that the militant feelings aroused by the strike were responsible for electoral victories of a number of anti-UNP candidates. In any event, an important fact that is frequently and conveniently overlooked by most political commentators is that D. S. Senanayake and his UNP failed to win a majority in the first parliamentary elections held in 1947, despite the vicious anti-Marxist campaign—with posters screaming slogans such as “Save religion from the flames of Marxism”. Out of 100 seats, the UNP won only 46. The three left parties, fighting separately, won 20 seats (LSSP won 10, the BLP 5 and the CP 5), while the Tamil Congress and the Ceylon Indian Congress won 7 seats each. The Independents won 20 seats. It was clear that the Independents held the fate in their hands. Both sides wooed them. The famous “Yamuna” conference of all anti-UNP forces took place at the residence of Mr. H. Sri Nissanka, but failed to agree. The situation was made easy for the UNP, when Colvin R. de Silva, the BLP leader, antagonised the Independents by castigating them as three-headed donkeys. D. S. Senanayake succeeded in luring sufficient number of Independents into his camp in order to enable him to form a Cabinet. But the fact remained that his party had polled only a minority of votes at the elections.

An incidental fact that deserves mention is that the 1947 election is the one in which the left parties fared best. Out of a total of 100 elected seats, the three left parties won 20 seats. In 1952 the figure was reduced to 13, and in 1956 to 17. In 1960 and 1965, in a parliament expanded to 150 seats, the number won by the left parties declined percentagewise.

Only in 1970, because of the united front agreement with the SLFP did they improve their performance, but not to the total of the one fifth level reached in 1947.

In February 1948 was staged the farce of granting so-called independence to Ceylon. The basis of this transfer of the semblance of power has already been described. But let it be noted that even this semblance of power was not granted before D. S. Senanayake, acting without prior consultation with parliament, had signed a Defence Agreement with Britain. Incidentally, this agreement has never been subsequently abrogated. Ceylon passed from being a colony to a neo-colony. The outward trappings of independence—the national flag, the national anthem, a brown man in Queen's House, etc.—were all there. But the essence of imperialist exploitation continued.

D. S. Senanayake was deeply conscious of the fact that he had not been accepted by the majority of the people. All his policies were, therefore, aimed at winning an absolute majority at the general elections. He set about the process of systematically bribing the electorate. He soon ran down Ceylon's sterling balances held in London through imports of foodstuffs. Had that money been invested in import of industrial machinery, the country's benefit would have been immense. But Senanayake did not believe in industrialist development.

But that was not to be his worst fault. It was during his regime that the practice of subsidising rice began. Today everybody recognises the intolerable burden that this subsidy, which has surpassed the Rs. 600 million mark annually, imposes on the economy. But now subsidised rice has become politics. If one can point to any single measure taken consciously by a government, which has contributed most to the economic ruin of the country, it is this action to subsidise rice taken by D. S. Senanayake. Future generations will live to curse his name.

Before the end of 1948, D. S. Senanayake won over his hitherto implacable opponent, G. G. Ponnampalam, with the offer of a portfolio. It must be remembered that Ponnampalam had defeated Senanayake's nominee, A. Mahadaveda (son of Ponnampalam



Arunachalam) at the 1947 elections for the Jaffna seat. Therefore, this coming together was an utterly opportunistic move on the part of both. But it broke up the Tamil Congress. S. J. V. Chelvanayagam left to form the Federal Party, which was to continue with communal politics in the North. The Tamil Congress, while not eschewing communalism, ceased to play any effective role in Tamil or Ceylon politics after 1948, although Ponnampalam managed to retain his seat till 1970. He himself gave up his fight for fifty-fifty and went back on his past principles to the extent of supporting D. S. Senanayake's measures for depriving the Tamil Plantation Workers of Indian origin of their citizenship and right to vote.

In 1951, crisis struck the UNP. It was an event that was to affect the future political development of Ceylon. The leader of the House and the most talented man from among those who surrounded D. S. Senanayake and the scion of one of Ceylon's pro-imperialist and aristocratic families, and married into a Kandyan feudal family, was S. W. R. D. Bandaranayake, who had received a liberal education at Oxford. He had always fancied himself as the heir-apparent. But now it looked as if "old man" Senanayake had other ideas. Senanayake skillfully promoted the rivalry between S. W. R. D. Bandaranayake and Sir John Kotalawela, his nephew — while all the time he had set his heart on his son succeeding him. Bandaranayake left the UNP in disgust, and crossed over to the Opposition.

In the same year, Bandaranayake formed the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). Whatever the reason that impelled him to leave the UNP, he quickly saw the potentialities in uniting all the anti-UNP forces, and of catering to the nationalistic and cultural aspirations of the common man. He had been a Donoughmore Buddhist—the reverse of the rice Christians. He had adopted the national dress. Later, he began to champion the Sinhalese language, although he himself was steeped in Western culture. In doing all these, he showed himself uncommonly responsive to popular feeling, and this was to stand him in good stead. If it was opportunism, it was of a kind that could be excused. But, for the time being, he remained in the wilderness.

Then, on March 22nd, 1952, D. S. Senanayake fell from his horse, while riding at the Galle Face green, and died. There immediately followed the most unseemly wrangle for succession, which has been so inimitably recorded by a supporter of one of the contestants, Sir John Kotalawela, in the widely popular: "The Premier Stakes". But then the "old man" decided the issue from his grave. It would appear that he had advised the Governor-General, Lord Soulbury (then on leave in England) that, in the event of anything untoward happening to him (D.S.) Soulbury should call his son, Dudley, to form the government. This is precisely what Soulbury did on his hurried return — ignoring the claim of the most senior colleague of D.S., Sir John Kotalawala—who sulked about for a little while, but, finally agreed to serve under Dudley.

That Dudley Senanayake was made to succeed his father in real dynastic fashion, and that Mr. Bandaranayake on his assassination was succeeded by his widow, and the fact that hitherto no one had become the Prime Minister of Ceylon, who was not a Sinhala, Goigama, Buddhist, reveals the depth of the prevalence of feudal ideas in the country. This idea that a father's political views can best be interpreted only by his son, and that only a widow can best interpret her dead husband's political legacy, is not a democratic one. It is a feudal idea. In the case of the son, he, at least, had the consolation of having served as a Minister in his father's cabinet. In the case of the widow, she had not even been in the political confidence of her husband. So much are we enmeshed in feudal traditions and ideas that there is already talk that the one aim of the present Prime Minister is to stick to the reigns of power long enough to manoeuvre the succession to her son!

Victory at the general elections of 1952 was relatively easy for Dudley Senanayake, as he exploited to the full the emotional feelings generated over his father's death. The elections were held ahead of time, because John Exter, American head of the Central Bank, had warned of the impending economic crisis, and had advised getting a fresh mandate through elections before resorting to harsh measures. The 1953 UNP budget spelt out the measures by which the burdens of the eco-



conomic crisis were to be transferred on to the shoulders of the people. The rice subsidy was abolished—sending the price of rice from 25 cents to 75 cents per measure. Railway and postal rates were increased, and the mid-day bun was snatched from the school children.

But the people were not willing to accept the burden. The leadership of the left parties had not yet degenerated to the reformism of later years. On the united call of the three left parties, and the trade unions under their leadership, a hartal was called for August 12th, 1953. The response of the people was stupendous. All sections of the working class, except the plantation workers, answered the call. Despite Mr. Bandaranaike's refusal to join in issuing the call for the Hartal, almost the entirety of the anti-UNP forces joined in the mighty wave of protest. Buses and trains could not run. Shops were closed. All work ceased, and the government was paralysed, while the Cabinet was reported to have met in the safety of a ship in the Harbour of Colombo. It was the highest pitch of revolutionary action so far seen in Ceylon. It was an indication of how far the masses were willing to go, if they were given a united and revolutionary leadership.

Unfortunately, the grand response of the people frightened the reformist leadership of the left parties as much as it did the government. The former called off the movement on the afternoon of the 12th itself, while the latter declared a state of emergency, and resorted to mass scale repression. Twelve people were shot dead, while hundreds were jailed. One outcome of the Hartal was that the Prime Minister got cold feet, and resigned, and faded out of politics till his re-entry in 1960.

Sir John Kotalawala now became Prime Minister, and followed a policy of absolute reaction at home, and complete subservience to the imperialists in foreign affairs. Ever willing to be used as a cat's paw by the imperialists, he went to the famous Bandung conference, and made a provocative anti-communist speech, which was intended to nettle Chou-En Lai. But the latter ignored him with the remark: "I have not come here to

quarrel". His tenure as Prime Minister was equally notorious for his refusal to permit entry to a Soviet soccer team and a team of Soviet scientists to observe the solar eclipse, as for his open contempt of the religious and cultural susceptibilities of the people as demonstrated by the barbacue incident. His total lack of contact with popular feeling was finally illustrated by his decision to hold elections prematurely on the mistaken ground that the UNP had never had it so good.

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## CHAPTER V

### The Bandaranayake Era.

But before the deluge overtook him, Sir John became instrumental for queering the pitch of the controversy that had arisen over the language issue. Apparently overwhelmed by the welcome accorded to him on one of the islands off Jaffna, where he was adorned with a crown, Sir John promised parity of status for Sinhalese and Tamil. The result was a violent reaction from the Sinhalese in the South. Stupefied by the storm he had created, Sir John tried to appease Sinhalese sentiment by holding the Kelaniya sessions of the UNP where the party switched to the decision that the official language of Ceylon shall be Sinhala only.

The patent insincerity of the volte face was too obvious to deceive any one. While it lost the UNP all its Tamil support, this decision did not deceive the Sinhalese. It was no wonder that S. W. R. D. Bandaranayake countered with the slogan that he would introduce Sinhalese only as the state language within twenty-four hours. Thus, during the election of April 1956, the question at issue between the two main Sinhalese parties was not whether Sinhala Only would be the state language, but who could be trusted to implement it. In this contest, Sir John was bound to lose. He represented to the Sinhalese everything that was anti-national and pro-western in their life. Besides, in Bandaranaike he had an opponent, who was a clever orator and able agitator.

But it would be wrong to suggest that the language issue was the only issue that affected the 1956 election results. No doubt, this issue cast its long shadow over the whole election. But there were other issues. The loose united front that Bandaranaike had rigged up around his SLFP, and which now was called the Mahajana Eksath Perumuna (MEP) had as one of its constituents an organisation of young and radical Buddhist priests, called the Eksath Bhikku Perumuna. Its members went all out and used the influence of the Sangha over the people, particularly in the rural areas, to turn the scale in favour of the M. E. P. Never before or after in recent times had the Buddhist priest-

hood played such a decisive role in Ceylon's politics. One of the key figures in this organisation of priests, Buddharakitta, was later to be found guilty and jailed (he died in jail) for being an accomplice in the assassination of Bandaranaike.

If Bandaranaike had learned from the mistakes of the UNP and trimmed his sails to suit the popular wind, he also walked away with some of the radical slogans which had been popularised by the left movement. Even the extremely radical demand for the nationalisation of foreign plantations found a place in the MEP election programme. Of course, it was never implemented. Immediately on coming to power, Bandaranayake virtually renounced this demand by announcing that it had been postponed for ten years. Perhaps the slogan was never meant to be implemented. But the point is that this demand never reappeared in any subsequent election programme — not even in the Common Programme, which was drafted by the SLFP in consultation with the LSSP and the Keuneman revisionist clique!

Bandaranaike further emphasised his shift to the left by including in his united front a splinter group from the LSSP, which was led by Philip Gunawardena, one of the founder members of the LSSP. He also came to no-contest agreements with the LSSP and the C.P. The result was that, for the first time, the UNP was faced with a near-united Opposition, and ended in complete rout. From their former position of 54 seats in Parliament, it was reduced to 8 seats. The MEP won 51 seats and polled 40.7% of the vote. It was a landslide victory.

It has been claimed by some that the 1956 MEP victory was a sort of peaceful peoples' revolution. The claim is not merely an exaggeration. It is false. There was definitely a shift of power from the comprador bourgeoisie to the national bourgeoisie, from the western oriented, English speaking, pro-imperialist minded sections of the bourgeoisie. But there was no revolution in the sense that the class structure of society was disturbed. Nor did the 1956 election victory in any way affect the stranglehold of foreign imperialism on the economy of the country. The same exploitation continued as formerly.



It is correct that several radical measures were carried out during the MEP regime. The bus service and the Port of Colombo were nationalised. The Paddy Lands Bill, a mild agrarian reform law, was passed; British bases were evacuated from Trincomalee and Katunayake. Workers were given greater freedom to strike. The Employees Provident Fund Bill became law. The Sinhala language and the Buddhist religion received greater attention. Diplomatic relations were established for the first time with socialist countries. In foreign policy, Ceylon began to play what has been described as a non-aligned role. This meant that we did not always line up automatically with the imperialists as of old. But all these still do not add up to revolution—peaceful or otherwise. In fact, what Bandaranaike did was to contain behind what he called his middle way policies the potentially dangerous anti-UNP current, to blunt its revolutionary edge and to divert it into the harmless channel of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. May be his greatest influence was on the leadership of the left movement. The desire to emulate the 1956 election victory of the MEP robbed the leadership of the LSSP and the CP of whatever revolutionary pretences they might have had, and converted them into faithful worshippers at the shrine of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. The further taming of the one-time revolutionaries was to be left to Bandaranaike's widow.

Looked at from this perspective, the claim of some commentators that Bandaranaike helped to avert violent revolution is not exaggerated.

But the best proof that the election victory of 1956 did not solve any economic problem was that the MEP and its supporters had to rouse communal and language feelings among the Sinhalese to maintain their support. During the MEP regime occurred the worst communal holocaust that Ceylon has ever experienced. Since this event deserves a detailed study, it is just as well, at this point, to study the communal problem as it arose at this time.

The rejection of communal representation or any form of special representation for minorities by the Donoughmore and Soulbury Commissions had left the minorities in a permanent state of minority in the legislative bodies of the country. The formation

of the All-Sinhala Board of Ministers in 1936, the passage of the Citizenship Acts, which discriminated heavily against the Tamil plantation workers of Indian origin, and deprived them of citizenship and the right to vote; as well as the unimaginative and almost irresponsible attitude of the leadership of the Tamil minority on national issues (e.g. opposition to the evacuation of the British bases, flying black flags on national day) had contributed to further communal bitterness.

The communal cancer that was festering inside suddenly came out into the open in 1955, in the form of the language controversy. From the time of the reforms resolution moved in the Second State Council by Bandaranaike and even earlier, all political parties had accepted that both Sinhala and Tamil (called the *swabhasha*) would replace English as the official language. Suddenly in 1955, the agitation broke out among the Sinhalese that Sinhala only should be the State language.

Straight away, one peculiar feature of this agitation must be noted. In most countries, the communal problem takes the form of an agitation by a minority to safeguard its linguistic or other rights from being trampled under foot by a majority. But in Ceylon it was the majority that spear-headed an agitation to safeguard its language against what it feared was encroachment by the language of the minority. The peculiar reasons, which made the Sinhalese majority behave and act as if it was a minority must be studied and appreciated, if we are to arrive anywhere near an understanding of this complicated problem.

The reasons that make the Sinhalese behave like a minority in the land where they are actually a majority are many. The first is the memory of the ancient Tamil invasions from South India. The Sinhalese are never allowed to forget this. What schoolboy has not read of the epic battle between Duttu Gemunu and Elara? Every time one goes to view the ruins at Anuradhapura or Polonnaruwa, he is reminded that all these ancient glories of Sinhalese civilisations were brought to destruction by successive Tamil invasions.

Secondly, the British imperialists brought over nearly a million Tamil workers from South India during the last century to work in their plantations and dumped them in the midst of



Kandyan territory. Thereby, they created the Ceylon-Indian problem, another cause for communal bickering.

Thirdly, the increased educational facilities made available to the Tamils in the North as a result of missionary activity and the imperialist policy of divide and rule resulted in Tamils obtaining a higher percentage of jobs in government service and in the professions than their population figures warranted. When—after the 1929-31 world economic crisis—unemployment became a serious problem among the Sinhalese middle class, and they started to turn towards service under government for employment, they found the Tamils already entrenched there.

Here, it must be pointed out that economic issues were at the bottom of the language crisis. Before 1956, knowledge of the English language had been the passport to service under the government. As a result, the Tamil was able to compete on equal or even better terms with the Sinhalese. Compelled by the pressure of unemployment, the Sinhalese wanted Sinhala Only to be the official language—thus giving them the best chances for service under the government. As in a non-industrialised country like Ceylon, government is not only the biggest single employer, but government service is the most gainful occupation, the battle of the languages was in reality a battle for government jobs for the respective middle classes. That is also the reason why no solution other than an economic one can ever bring lasting results.

Fourthly, Tamil happens to be a language spoken by over 40 million people across the Palk Straits. This leads to fear of cultural aggression from India.

Fifthly, Tamil also happens to be an older and more developed language than Sinhalese. Hence, a feeling of inferiority among the Sinhalese.

Without an appreciation of these historical realities, it is impossible to understand the development of the language question in Ceylon. After the MEP victory, Bandaranaike made one serious attempt to settle the language question through negotiations with the FP leader, Chelvanayagam. The result of these negotiations was the famous Bandaranaike — Chelvanayagam Pact. It accepted

certain safeguards for the Tamil language in the northern and eastern parts of Ceylon under the general context of the acceptance of Sinhala as the official language for the whole of Ceylon. It also reached certain compromises on the vexed question of colonisation in the Tamil areas.

It is necessary to make some reference here to the relationship between the communal problem and colonisation. When after the 1935 Land Commission report, D. S. Senanayake started his colonisation schemes, most of these were located in what is called the Dry Zone. In the beginning, most of these were in the North Central Province. But some were started in the Northern and Eastern provinces, which have been claimed by the Tamils as their traditional homelands. Of course, the whole island once belonged to the Sinhalese. But if we take the last four centuries or so, the claim of the Tamils to have inhabited the Northern and Eastern provinces is not far fetched.

Anyway, the Tamil leaders opposed the colonisation of Tamil areas by Sinhalese colonists. This is where the land question encroached upon the communal question. This raises the question as to whether the Tamils have developed into a nation and are, therefore, entitled to call a portion of Ceylon theirs. The question as to whether the Ceylon Tamils have as yet developed into a nation must be answered in the negative, because they do not possess one of the major attributes mentioned by Stalin in his famous definition of the conditions that should be fulfilled by a people before they could be recognised as a nation. They do not share a common economy.

The Tamils inhabit some of the most barren and uneconomic parts of Ceylon. There is neither a mountain nor a river in the northern part of Ceylon. As a result, Tamils have had to emigrate to Malaya or go south in search of jobs. The fact that they spoke the same language as the labourers imported by the British to work in their plantations enabled many of them to find jobs as supervisors and clerks in these plantations. For the rest, they joined the government service in large numbers. Many families boast of at least one employee under the government.



This, then is the contradiction in which the Tamils find themselves. They live in one part of Ceylon, and earn most of their living from another. The demand for some measure of autonomy for the Tamils would have been irresistible, if the Tamils could also restrict themselves to an area. It would also have been more realisable. Similarly, the opposition to Sinhalese colonists on Tamil lands would have been valid if the Tamils could give up their right to ownership to land and the right to employment in any part of Ceylon. The situation has changed slightly since as a result of the ban on import of subsidiary foodstuffs due to lack of foreign exchange. The industrious Jaffna farmer seized this opportunity to grow these crops and there is the definite sign of the emergence of a rich peasant class.

Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the ulterior motive behind colonising Tamil areas with Sinhalese was to eventually transform a Tamil majority province into a Sinhalese majority province. D. S. Senanayake was a shrewd Sinhalese leader. He never openly professed communalism. But he steadfastly worked towards the goal of Sinhalising the Tamil areas. This cat was let out of the bag by one of D. S. S's colleagues, V. Ratnayake, in a speech made after the death of D. S. Senanayake.

The Bandaranaike - Chelvanayagam Pact was possibly the best compromise possible under the circumstances. But it was not given a chance. The UNP tried to fish in troubled waters, and organised a march to Kandy to mobilise opposition to the Pact. Bandaranaike probably rose to his greatest height as a statesman in his defence of the Pact. His famous—probably his best—speech made at the Bogambara grounds, Kandy, will always be remembered as embodying all that was best in him. But the chauvinistic elements in his camp also rebelled. Instead of coming to his help, the leaders of the Federal Party chose this very moment to launch the silly anti - Sri campaign. The Pact was torn up. The Anti - Sri campaign of the Federal Party was countered by the tar brush campaign led by the Sinhala "warrior" K. M. P. Rajaratna in the south, in the course of which Tamil words on public places were all obliterated by a liberal application of tar.

Tension mounted on both sides, till it led to the worst communal blood bath in Ceylon's history. It is an event, about which

every right thinking Ceylonese should hang down his head in shame. It will remain a permanent blot on our country's history. Over night, men turned into beasts, and descended to the level that they could pour petrol over and set fire to people with whom they had no quarrel, except that they spoke a different tongue.

The immediate cause for this dreadful outbreak must be shouldered by the extremist leaders of the Federal Party, who started the anti-Sri campaign, the fanatical communalists among the Sinhalese, who let loose the tar brush campaign, and the help-less indecisiveness displayed by the Bandaranaike government, as the movement spread. Only a declaration of a state of emergency brought the situation under control. The fact that the Tamils stranded in the south had to be taken to the north by ship represented the lowest ebb to which communal relations between the Sinhalese and the Tamils had fallen in recent times.

The riots were also a reflection of the political bankruptcy of the Federal Party, whose leaders were detained during the early days of the emergency. It was powerless to look after the interests of the Tamils, it claimed to represent. But it continued its sterile course—preaching communalism in the north, estranging even progressive Sinhalese opinion by opposing every radical measure brought forward by the two Bandaranaike governments, e.g. the Paddy Lands Bill, the Schools Take Over, etc., and living in the hope that they would be able to act as arbiters between the two rival groups of Sinhalese politicians, and thus strike an opportunistic bargain for the Tamils. It was simply an attempt to trade the rights of the Tamils at the table of one or the other of the two Sinhalese parties. Such an opportunity did arise for the Federal Party in 1965. But of its later.

Probably spurred by the realisation that the passage of the Sinhala Only Bill had irrevocably estranged Tamil support from the MEP government (the Tamils in Sinhalese areas had, for the most part, supported the MEP against the UNP in the 1956 elections), Bandaranaike piloted through parliament a bill to provide for the Reasonable Use of Tamil. It has remained a virtual dead letter. No regulations were framed under it. When a subsequent UNP government tried to do so, it ran into violent opposition from the SLFP. Anyway, it did not succeed in satisfying the Tamils.



It remains to be pointed out that the LSSP and the CP were the only national parties with a predominantly Sinhalese membership and following to stick out for parity of status for Sinhala and Tamil during this period. But this did not last long. Under the twin pressures of parliamentary opportunism and communalism, they fell into line with the SLFP thinking on this issue.

It is futile today to argue the merits and de-merits of the Sinhala Only proposal. But a progressive should measure the correctness or justness of any proposal only by one criterion: Does it unite or disrupt anti-imperialist forces? By this standard, the proposal to make Sinhala Only the State language must be judged to be retrograde. It definitely widened a secondary contradiction (that between the Sinhalese and the Tamils) and pushed to the background the main contradiction (that between imperialism and both the Sinhalese and Tamil peoples). It made a foe of a friend, and gave comfort to the enemy. It also was the main cause of the racial riots of 1958.

Mr. Bandaranaike's MEP was, at its best only a marriage of convenience between forces holding divergent views, but united under the personality of Bandaranaike, and by their common opposition to the UNP. But the stress of keeping forces with such divergent views together proved too much. The split came in early 1959 over the issue of an Agricultural Cooperative Bank and that of raising the guaranteed price of paddy. Philip Gunawardena and his colleague William Silva parted company from the MEP. At the Kurunegaia session of the SLFP that took place at this time, Bandaranaike was forced to make his first anti-communist speech.

The parting of ways with the radical elements of his cabinet had left Bandaranaike a prisoner of the reactionary sections—some of whose representatives successfully plotted his assassination on the 25th of September, 1959. As he bent low to pay his respects to a Buddhist monk, who was seated on his verandah, the monk whipped out a pistol from out of his robes, and emptied it into the frail figure of the Prime Minister. It was the eve of the day on which the Prime Minister was to have left for the UNO. On the next day, the Prime Minister succumbed to his injuries.

The circumstances of his death, and the courage with which he met it, as well as the spirit of forgiveness, which he displayed to his assailant, have built a halo around his name. An attempt was even made to deify him. Under such circumstances, no sober appraisal of his place in Ceylon politics has been made. A legend has sprung up about the so-called Bandaranaike policies he is alleged to have followed. But if any one is pinned down to explain what is meant by the Bandaranaike policies, no satisfactory answer is forthcoming. Perhaps the vagueness of the concept permits each one to interpret it in his own way and do as he likes all the while claiming to be a devout follower of the Bandaranaike policies — which is what is happening now.

But even if one tries to discern any recognisable element in the policies followed by Bandaranaike, one might say that he thought that he was a sort of bridge between two worlds — one that was not yet dead, and the other not yet born. That was why he was fond of referring to Ceylon's present phase as an age of transition. He tried to outline what he called a Middle Way, by which he meant the avoidance of the extremes of both Capitalism and Communism. This was, of course, an illogical and unscientific concept. The choice for Ceylon was not between Capitalism and Communism. Anyway, there is no middle way between the two. The choice for Ceylon was between the slavery of neo-colonialism and genuine national independence. Bandaranaike could not see this. When he died, the chains of neo-colonialism were rivetted on Ceylon even more firmly than when he took power. The exploitation to which the mass of the people was subjected remained just as severe. Not a single economic problem had been solved. The concept of a middle way is really an attempt to prettify the continuance of the status quo, and an explanation for postponing radical change.

In the realm of foreign affairs, at least, Bandaranaike's policy of non-alignment meant that Ceylon moved away from her position of being a camp follower of the imperialist powers. But non-alignment was not a dynamic policy. For the most part, it meant making the best of both worlds, and playing one side against the other. Still, it paid dividends up to a point. Beyond that, all countries have to choose sides. Some of the most vociferously



non-aligned countries, like India, have today ended up among the most aligned countries. In any case, Bandaranaike's non-aligned policies won Ceylon more friends in the international field than ever before.

It took nearly a year for a successor to Bandaranaike to emerge, and for the establishment of political stability of some sort. When Bandaranaike died, the obvious political choice was the leader of the House, C. P. de Silva. But he belonged to the wrong caste. Luckily for feudalism in Ceylon. C. P. de Silva was ill and receiving treatment in London at the time of his leader's death. The cabinet chose W. Dahanayake to fill the Prime Ministerial vacancy. It was an extremely foolish choice, and nobody has explained how that choice was made. Mercifully, it did not last for long. Dahanayake sacked nearly half his cabinet, and appointed his nominees. But before he could be challenged in Parliament, he ordered dissolution and fresh elections. He formed a new party to contest the elections. Every candidate from this party, including Dahanayake, lost the election—most of them losing their deposits.

The March 1960 elections did not produce any decisive results. No party obtained an absolute majority in parliament. But the UNP emerged the single biggest party in Parliament with the SLFP in second place. The left parties fared badly. Each of the three left parties fought the election separately and lost badly. This election will be remembered as the one in which both N. M. Perera and Philip Gunawardena made futile bids to become Prime Minister, with the support of only their respective parties. Worse sectarianism and divorce from reality cannot be imagined. It is now difficult to believe that the LSSP fought this election with the slogan "Make N. M. Prime Minister".

Dudley Senanayake tried to form a UNP government, but was defeated on the first vote of non-confidence. The Federal Party, on this occasion, refused to go along with the UNP. New elections were ordered for July 1960. More common sense and reality prevailed among the anti-UNP forces for this election. Mrs. Bandaranaike had by now accepted the leadership of the SLFP. Having eaten humble pie, the LSSP was willing for a non-contest pact with the SLFP, although it was still not ready to talk to the CP, which had in both March and July advocated a common anti-UNP united front.

These non-contest agreements between the SLFP, LSSP and the CP resulted in a clear victory of the anti-UNP forces. But, quite unexpectedly, the SLFP won sufficient seats (75) to form a government of its own, without the aid of the left parties. This was a great disappointment, in particular to the LSSP, which had hoped that a situation would materialise, where its support would be necessary for the SLFP to form a government. The new government was, therefore, a pure SLFP government (but backed by the left parties)—a second Bandaranaike government, but this time under the Premiership of Mrs. Bandaranaike. She herself had not contested a seat. Conventions were all set aside, and she was found a seat in the Senate. Thus, she became the world's first woman Prime Minister.

But Mrs. Bandaranaike was to find the going tough. Her first period of Premiership proved to be a turbulent one. It was to be remembered for the heightened economic crisis, the Federal Party's Satyagraha movement, the attempted coup by top military and police officers, the rise and fall of the United Left Front and the Joint Committee of Trade Unions, the formation of the Coalition government, the signing of the Srimavo-Shastri Pact, further splits in the left movement, and the fall of the government over the controversial Press Bill.

Very early in the tenure of the new government, its Finance Minister, Felix Dias Bandaranaike, was forced to attempt to find a way out of the economic crisis with a proposal to do away with a part of the rice subsidy. But he was forced to retreat on this issue by the government's parliamentary party, and he resigned his portfolio in keeping with the conventions of bourgeois parliamentary democracy. The fact that the SLFP government had to change its Finance Minister five times during as many years is a pointer to the extreme nature of the economic crisis which had overtaken Ceylon. No one could find a solution. The ultimate solution (which was no solution) was a political one, to which we will refer later.

Finding that their support among the Tamil people was being eroded as a result of the defeat they suffered over the language issue and their impotence during the communal riots, the leadership of the Federal Party had to do something dramatic to re-



capture the peoples' imagination and retain their support. They decided to organise a satyagraha movement in Jaffna. As was to be expected, the response was big. The Federal Party managed to whip up a lot of support and continuous batches of satyagrahis successfully barricaded the Kachcheri gates. The success of the movement turned the heads of the Federal Party leaders, and they resorted to measures, which savoured of rebellion and an attempt to set up a separate state. They started issuing their own stamps.

The government decided to act, and ordered its troops to break up the satyagrahis. This they did without opposition. The Federal Party had made no plans for such a contingency, and the movement collapsed. Again, the reason why the Tamils, despite overwhelming unity among themselves, could not resort to something even remotely resembling the rebellion in Northern Ireland is to be found in the fact that economic interests of too many Tamils are to be found in the south of Ceylon.

1962 was also to see the attempted coup by top ranking police and military officers. Involved in this coup were the Captain of the Ceylon Volunteer Force, the Commander of the Navy, the Deputy Inspector General of Police, and several other high ranking police officers, Civil Servants, and prominent businessmen. If they had political associates, they were never ferretted out. The coup was well planned, and failed only because one police officer (the present Inspector General of Police, Stanley Senanayake) got cold feet, and blurted out the conspiracy to his wife, who told it to her father, P. de S. Kularatne, and through him the news went to the I.G.P. It was just in the nick of time.

One or two of the conspirators committed suicide. The rest were tried and found guilty, and sentenced by the Supreme Court, but were released on a point of law by the Privy Council. The attempted coup and the big names involved proved a big sensation. It was the first time a coup had been attempted in Ceylon. On certain suspicions arising out of the investigations into the attempted coup, the government forced the resignation of the Governor-General, Sir Oliver Goonatileke. Theoretically, he was the Queen's representative, and her permission was necessary before he was sacked. Delicate negotiations procured the permis-

sion, but on certain conditions. It was a humiliating end to one who had been the behind-the-scene advisor to every Prime Minister, and who had been dubbed by some as Our Evil Genius (O.E.G.). William Gopallawa, a relative of Mrs. Bandaranaike, succeeded him. The coup also resulted in a wave of sympathy for the government, as all the conspirators were well known reactionaries, who had no popular support or sympathy.

The economic crisis began to deteriorate. Strikes became frequent. Some of the longest strikes in history—the Port strike, the Banks strike, the Wellawatte Mills strike—took place in this period. The government announced a policy of wage freeze, and followed a policy of “sitting out” strikes and of using the army to break strikes in essential services. This produced serious re-thinking in trade union circles. In the first half of 1963, the Ceylon Trade Union Federation proposed that, since isolated strike actions of the working class were all ending without success, the entire trade union movement in both the public and the private sector should unite behind a common set of demands for united trade union action. The C.T.U.F. also convened the first conference of all the major trade union centres at its office in April, 1963. Thus, was born the Joint Committee of Trade Unions, which formulated the famous twenty one demands on behalf of the entire trade union movement. This represented the highest water mark of trade union unity ever achieved in Ceylon. Private sector employees and public sector employees, clerical employees and non-clerical grades, plantation workers and urban workers, teachers and technicians—all were brought into a single common front for the first time. The first all-island conference of the JCTU was held at the Ceylinco Hotel in September, 1963.

Simultaneously, a movement had begun for the unification of the left movement. Except for the first four years of its existence, the curse of the left movement had been its dis-unity. The LSSP had split and re-split. The formation of the C.P. was the result of one split and that of the Philip Gunawardena splinter group the result of another. The doctrinaire differences that divided these parties were hardly understood by the people, who naturally desired to see all the left forces united, so that they could effectively fight reaction and bring about the much hoped-for end of exploitation.



Soon after Philip Gunawardena split from the LSSP in 1951, his party entered into a united front agreement with the CP, which was called the CP—LSSP United Front. It was at this time that the LSSP, led by N. M. Perera, was dubbed the Nava (new) LSSP. The CP—LSSP United Front carried on an extensive campaign for left unity, which had the result of creating another split in the LSSP. In protest against the opposition of the leadership of the NLSSP to left unity, an influential section, which included T. B. Subasinghe, William Silva, Stanley Tillekeratne split away from the NLSSP. This group joined Philip Gunawardena's party at first. But, within a year, all except a few like Subasinghe and William Silva joined the CP. On the eve of the 1956 elections, Philip Gunawardena broke off from the CP—LSSP United Front, to join Bandaranaike and his MEP.

Now, in 1963, the movement for left unity gained momentum, particularly in view of the poor performance of the SLFP, and the threat of extreme reaction staging a come-back. By May Day 1963, sufficient progress had been made so that the three left parties called for a united May Day Rally. The enthusiasm of the ordinary people for left unity can be gauged from the gigantic demonstration and rally that took place on that day. Ceylon had never seen anything like that ever before, or ever since. Not only did unprecedented thousands march in the demonstration, but thousands more thronged the route, lining it several deep and occupying every vantage point, to watch this unique spectacle which to many was the realisation of their deeply cherished hopes. The Galle Face Green teemed with humanity. In comparison, the rival rallies held by the SLFP and the UNP faded into insignificance. Such scenes had only been seen in socialist countries on occasions like the May Day parades or National Day celebrations. The potentialities represented by that magnificent mobilisation of the left forces on that May Day of 1963 must be kept in mind to fully assess the depth of the treachery that was enacted in the next year by the formation of the coalition government. For, even as the three leaders drove in a jeep at the head of the May Day procession, they had other ideas as to what use they were going to put this trust that the people had bestowed on them.

The formal agreement bringing the United Left Front into being was signed on Hartal Commemoration Day, August 12, 1963,

with a ceremony at Independence Square. But the spirit of that year's May Day could not be re-created. Doubts had already begun to arise about the sincerity of the leaders. Here were three parties, who had been feuding against each other—and how!—for the best part of a quarter of a century. Suddenly, the leaders announce that they had agreed to unite their forces. But there was no statement of self—criticism of who was wrong earlier, or where the mistakes lay. In other words, the people were not taken into confidence about the reasons for so many years of left disunity. It was difficult to escape the conclusion that the hastily concluded agreement for unity was an opportunistic one for winning as many seats as possible in parliament; and that it was devoid of principle.

That this estimate is correct was borne out by the fact that the ULF did not last even a year.

The year 1963 also saw the polarisation of the forces representing Marxism - Leninism on the one hand and modern revisionism on the other hand, inside the CP. As has been pointed out earlier, the leadership of the CP had, by and large, been always revisionist under the ideological influence of the Communist Parties of Great Britain and India. Here, it must be pointed out that, contrary to popular belief, the Ceylon C.P. had no contact with the Soviet C.P. till after 1956. The reason for this was the fact, that the C.P. in Ceylon was formed after the dissolution of the Third Communist International. The first contact was made at the 8th Congress of the Chinese C.P. held in 1956, when the delegates of the Ceylon C.P. met the delegates of the Soviet C.P., who had also come to attend the Chinese Party's Congress.

But after Khrushchov usurped power by means of a palace revolution and embarked on the treacherous course of modern revisionism, abandoning the revolutionary principles of Marxism-Leninism, he sought to bring all communist parties into the revisionist orbit. From the 21st Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Ceylon C.P. received regular invitations for all congresses of the Soviet Party. Pieter Keuneman, General Secretary of the C.P., returned from the 22nd Congress in 1962 with an "order" to have a resolution supporting the counter-revolutionary



theses of the 20th and 22nd Congress of the Soviet Party railroaded through the central committee of the C. P. He had, at that Congress, already obeyed the Soviet baton and, without any authority from the central committee, attacked Albania for defying Khrushchov and his revisionism.

But Keuneman found his task tough going. It must be mentioned here that the Ceylon C. P. had never officially discussed the 20th Congress of the Soviet Party, where Khrushchov made his secret attack on Stalin. The reason for this was that, inasmuch as the Party had been born with the name of Stalin on its lips, as it were, in the course of the struggle with Trotskyism, the whole party was intensely pro-Stalin. The leadership knew this, and did not dare to risk a discussion. But it could not be postponed any more.

By this time, the difference between the Marxist-Leninist line of the Communist Party of China, and the modern revisionist line of the Soviet Party, had come out into the open. The discussion inside the central committee of the Ceylon C. P. reflected this difference in lines within the international communist movement. The majority took the path of modern revisionism, and started a witch hunt against the Marxist-Leninists. The latter convened the 7th Congress of the Party, which had been unconstitutionally postponed repeatedly by the leadership, and reformed themselves as the Marxist-Leninist Ceylon Communist Party, and declared their allegiance to Marxism-Leninism — Mao Tsetung Thought. An early trial of strength between the two factions took place at the 13th Congress of the Ceylon Trade Union Federation, the biggest mass organisation under the leadership of the CP, in December, 1963. The modern revisionists were decisively defeated and the leadership of the C. T. U. F. preserved in Marxist-Leninist hands.

The year 1964 faced the government with mounting economic problems. The rising tide of discontent among the working class was reflected in the twin growth of the ULF and the JCTU. Mrs. Bandaranaike was alarmed. On March 21, 1964, when the JCTU held a mammoth Galle Face Rally in support of its 21 demands, Mrs. Bandaranaike cancelled her appointment to

address a meeting outside Colombo, and stayed inside Temple Trees, because she had received reports of lorry loads of workers coming from all parts to the rally.

She decided to act quickly. Open repression was out of the question. She decided on the well known tactics of taking the enemy's fortress from within. She indicated her willingness to hold talks with the leaders of the LSSP. Even before the beckoning finger of Mrs. Bandaranaike had ceased to move, both N. M. Perera and Philip Gunawardena collided inside Temple Trees through different doors, while poor Keuneman was left at the gate, begging for admission. The ULF was at an end—destroyed by the very men who had set it up only months before. It was a shrewd tactical move by Mrs. Bandaranaike. At one stroke, she obtained the submission of the left leaders, which had eluded her husband. Men who had refused to be lieutenants to her more able husband now lay practically prostrate at her feet. The working class and left movement had been sadly betrayed. N. M. Perera and two of his party colleagues were rewarded with Ministerial jobs, and the coalition government came into existence. One is reminded of Lenin's famous definition of a coalition government as a joint cabinet of the bourgeoisie with the renegates from socialism. He must have had Ceylon of 1964 in mind, when he made that statement.

One result of the decision of the LSSP to join a Coalition Government with the SLFP was another split in the party. A faction led by Samarakkody, Merryl Fernando and Bala Tampoe broke away to form the LSSP (R)—'R' standing for revolutionary. This group split in turn, Samarakkody left it to form an LSSP with the (R) in front of it. Both groups are still quarrelling as to who are the genuine Trotskyists.

With an election round the corner, Mrs. Bandaranaike went to India to hold negotiations on the Ceylon-Indian problem. The Srimavo-Sastri Pact was signed. Ceylon agreed to give citizenship to 300,000 people of Indian origin. India agreed to take back 545,000. The fate of the balance was to be decided later. The acceptance of these figures by Ceylon was itself a tacit admission that the earlier laws had been unjust. But the major drawback of this Pact was that it said not a word as to what would happen if



these figures were not reached on a voluntary basis. Supposing 545,000 did not apply for Indian citizenship? Was force to be used? The question was left beautifully vague. Although the Pact figured as a major point at subsequent elections, not much has been done up till now (1971) to implement it in any measure.

The major controversy during the lifetime of the coalition government was that over the Press Bill. To understand this question, it is essential to have an understanding of the set-up of the newspapers in Ceylon. Because of the high standard of literacy in Ceylon caused by free education from 1945, newspapers played an important role in influencing men's minds. The predominant position in the newspaper field at that time was held by the Associated Newspapers of Ceylon or Lake House, as it was called. It ran several daily newspapers in all three languages. It had been founded by D. R. Wijeyawardena, a colleague and friend of D. S. Senanayake. He had bought up existing newspapers to make his group a virtual monopoly. The only opposition was provided by the Times of Ceylon, which was originally British owned, and by the Tamil daily, Virakesari.

D. R. Wijeyawardena is often praised as a reforms leader and for his contribution to the movement for independence which he supported through his newspapers. But if he is to be judged by his efforts in the newspaper field, he must be credited with having established the greatest lie factory in Ceylon, and the biggest bastion of reaction. Lake House epitomised everything reactionary in Ceylon. It opposed every single progressive measure brought forward by any government. The report of a recent Royal Commission on its corrupt activities in deliberately contravening Exchange Control regulations and accumulating nearly two million rupees in the private accounts of the three of its directors in foreign banks (although after Wijeyawardena's death) should form the best epitaph over its grave, when it is laid to rest soon, as everyone hopes.

It fought the left movement from the beginning and was not choosy in the weapons it used - calumny, insinuations, half truths, downright lies, etc. Nothing was too bad if it could be used to beat the left. Bandaranaike, too, had to triumph over its

complete opposition. Being a good orator, Bandaranayake turned to the State radio, and used it against the bourgeois press. But his successors were incapable of this. They decided to curb Lake House. Already a public cry had risen for the take-over of Lake House. The coalition government now introduced a bill to nationalise Lake House. This is where it erred. It should have used its powers (if necessary, declared an emergency) to take over Lake House and talked afterwards. The mistake proved fatal.

Lake House moved its heavy guns into battle. The report of the Royal Commission details the steps taken by Lake House to meet this threat to its existence. Several lakhs of rupees were voted out and left to be spent at the absolute discretion of one or two directors. The allegation was later made in Parliament that those M. P.s, who crossed over to the opposition to vote against the government on December 4th, 1964, had been bribed by Lake House. The Royal Commission went into this question and declared that they had received no evidence to substantiate the allegation. But at the same time, it stated that the Directors of Lake House had no valid explanation about how large sums of money entrusted to them during this period were spent. We are left to draw our own conclusions.

The campaign against Lake House was one of the biggest to be seen in Ceylon. But Lake House triumphed over the weak tactics of the government. The "Golden brains" of the LSSP bungled the formulation and passage of the Press Bill through Parliament. Parliament **was** prorogued for the sole purpose of debating another bill for taking over Lake House. On the day of the voting on the Throne Speech of December 4th, 1964, a switch over of sufficient numbers of M.P.s from the SLFP to the Opposition was organised to enable the government to be defeated by one vote. The two M. Ps. of the LSSP (R), Samarakkoddy and Merryl Fernando, voted with the UNP and the rest of the reactionaries, and thus paved the way for the return of the UNP in 1965.

It must, however, be pointed out that during the period of the first government under the Prime Ministership of Mrs. Bandaranaike, several progressive measures were adopted. The more important ones were the Schools Take Over, the nationalisation of the Bank of Ceylon and Insurance, and the take over of all the



foreign oil companies. A dispute arose over the amount of compensation to the latter, and the US Government suspended its aid programme. The government finally agreed to pay a sum acceptable to the Americans. It must also be pointed out that it was during the period of this government that the first batch of US Peace Personnel came to Ceylon.

The 1965 elections proved indecisive, but the UNP came back as the biggest single group. The Federal Party was wooed by both sides, because its support could have enabled either party to form the government. Although subsequently violently critical of the UNP's alliance with the Federal Party, there can be no doubt about the fact that the SLFP tried its hardest to reach an agreement with the Federal Party, and was willing to go to its utmost in this connection. But, on the basis of a secret pact between Dudley Senanayake and Chelvanayagam, which has been admitted, but never published, the UNP formed a so-called National Government, which included Philip Gunawardene and W. Dahanayake. The UNP also roped in wealthy plantation owner Thondaman, who was also ironically enough, the leader of the biggest trade union of plantation workers. It was the interests of his class, and not that of the plantation workers of Indian origin, and possible advice from the Indian High Commission in Ceylon that decided Thondaman's volte face to lick the very foot that had kicked the plantation workers of Indian origin in 1948.

The rejected coalition parties responded with one of the loudest communal campaigns ever let loose, during the course of which derogatory remarks about the eating habits of the Tamils abounded. This was the time of the "Masala Vadai" line! The LSSP and the Keuneman revisionist clique were not to be outdone by the SLFP in their crude communal campaign.

On the 8th of January, 1966, when Dudley Senanayake tried to get through regulations to be framed under the Reasonable Use of Tamil Bill, the Opposition called a communal strike and demonstration, which led to the shooting and killing of a Buddhist monk, and the declaration of a state of emergency. Thousands of misled workers who had participated in that day's strike were victimised by the government and the State Corporations. The Federal Party was to find that its opportunism was not to pay after all. At the

instance of the Federal Party, Dudley Senanayake introduced a District Councils Bill, to afford some degree of autonomy to the districts. The coalition parties succeeded in rousing such an uproar in the country, also among the UNP ranks, that Dudley had to drop the Bill. Soon after, the Federal Party representative in the Cabinet resigned, and the illusion of a national government collapsed.

For the rest, the period of the 1965 government of Dudley Senanayake was noted for the still further worsening of the economic crisis. Following the devaluation of the Pound Sterling, and at the bidding of the World Bank, the rupee was devalued by 20%. Because the World Bank was not satisfied with the rate of devaluation, a further devaluation in the form of Foreign Exchange Entitlement Certificates Scheme was imposed. The rice ration was halved, but the first measure was given free. The cost of living sky-rocketed, and unemployment mounted. General strikes took place in the private sector and the public sector in 1967 and 1968 respectively. The only solution of the government to the mounting economic ills of Ceylon was to borrow extensively from imperialist agencies, like the World Bank. It borrowed more heavily than any other government. Thereby, it tightened still further the chains that bound Ceylon to foreign imperialism.

Politically, the SLFP, the LSSP and the Keuneman revisionist clique formed a United Front on the basis of a Common Programme, which was much weaker than the original 1956 MEP election manifesto of Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike.

This period also saw the bringing out into the open of the social oppression undergone by the depressed and untouchable castes in Jaffna. Under the leadership of the Mass Movement for the Eradication of Untouchability and the Caste System, these underprivileged people joined issue with their oppressors over the question of temple entry. The government sided with the caste Hindus, and let loose repression against the so-called depressed castes. Only the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party openly supported these so-called depressed castes and gave them leadership. The latter fought bravely and several lives were sacrificed. But the issue has not been completely settled. But, at least, this movement exposed the existence of such an inhuman system, and also the hypocrisy of the Federal Party, which called for equal rights



with the Sinhalese, but were unwilling to treat members, who speak their own language, as equals, because they belonged to a lower caste.

The 1970 general election turned itself into a direct confrontation between the United Front and the UNP. The Marxist-Leninist Communist Party alone warned against placing faith in the fraud of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, and called upon the people to have nothing to do with the elections. Although, at this time, relatively few people heeded this call, before a year had passed most people were to admit the correctness of that analysis. Although the United Front Government was returned to power with an overwhelming mandate of over a two-thirds majority in parliament, it stood as if paralysed and unable to solve any of the fundamental problems of the people. On the contrary, the cost of living kept soaring still higher, and unemployment became worse.

The very vastness of its parliamentary majority contained within it the seeds of its own destruction. By giving it such an overwhelming mandate, the people had given notice that they would accept no excuses. Disillusionment with the government was not long in coming. Having promised the very moon itself, the new government was beginning to go on the same rails as the UNP before it. Having vociferously criticised the UNP for its subservience to the World Bank, the new Finance Minister, Trotskyite Dr. N. M. Perera's first act was to go to it on a begging mission. Before a year was out, the government was fulfilling all the conditions laid down by the World Bank, and passing the burdens of the economic crisis on to the shoulders of the masses. The explosion did not take long to come.

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## CHAPTER VI

### An Analysis of the April 1971 Events in Ceylon

The gun shots that rang out on April 5th, 1971 at Wellawaya, heralding the outbreak of the foredoomed insurrection by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (J. V. P.), not only killed the policeman on duty at his desk. It also effectively demolished several myths about Ceylon, which had been sedulously cultivated by the bourgeois press and the bourgeois politicians.

Despite the notorious fact that our crime rate was about the third highest in the world, Ceylon was supposed to be a peaceful country, wedded to the doctrine of "maithiri" and non-violence, the Dhamma Deepa, whose protection had been entrusted to the special care of Indra by Sakra on the specific request of Lord Buddha just before he passed away. Despite the brutal violence witnessed during the communal troubles of 1958, when men were burnt alive because they belonged to the wrong race, the myth was created that the people of Ceylon were wedded to the democratic life, and were opposed to revolution and violence. In fact, at a public meeting held at Kandy a few weeks before the beginning of the insurrection, Mrs. Bandaranaike claimed that the country had been spared violence because it was specially protected by the gods.

But the **biggest** myth propagated about Ceylon was that its people were firmly wedded to the principles of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, that we were the only country that had zealously learned the art of democratic government from the British overlords, that we had successfully changed governments by the democratic process and that Ceylon was an oasis of stable government in an otherwise turbulent world.

All these theories lie shattered on the ground today. The readiness and the dedication with which numbers of young men and women came forward to sacrifice their lives, irrespective of the fact that they were mis-guided, badly led and followed completely wrong tactics, and were used from behind for reactionary



purposes, once and for all disposed of the theory to the effect that our people were not revolutionary. They are second to none. Let this be a warning to the reactionaries and an encouragement to the revolutionaries.

Secondly, the most “democratically” elected government is having to rule with the most unprecedentedly brutal dictatorial powers. Bourgeois democracy in Ceylon had always been a farce. Beginning as far back as the 1956 M. E. P. government of the late Mr. Bandaranaike, rule by State of emergency had become a rule. Both the 1960 government of Mrs. Bandaranaike, and the 1965 government of Dudley Senanayake competed with each other as to which government shall rule under a state of emergency for a longer period. The U. N. P. beat the S.L.F.P. by a small length. Anyway, both governments ruled for the greater part of their period under a state of emergency. That was democracy—a la Ceylon.

But the record has been improved under the present United Front government of Mrs. Bandaranaike. Coming to power with an unprecedented parliamentary majority of over two-thirds, it could not complete one year of its life without proclaiming a state of emergency. It is unlikely that it can lift the state of emergency during its span of life—however short or long it turns out to be. At the time the United Front government came to power in May 1970, Marxist—Leninists pointed out that the very vastness of the parliamentary majority contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction. The United Front, while in Opposition, had been lavish in its promises to the people. There was nothing they did not promise. Its leaders even boasted that, during the five long years they spent in opposition, they had drafted a master plan, which would be put into operation as soon as they climbed into the seats of power. They asked the people only for one thing: Give us an absolute majority so that we need not be dependent on other parties of groups. The people did more than that. They gave the U. F. a two-thirds majority. There was apparently nothing to stop the government from implementing its promises. A prostrate opposition also pledged its support. There could be no possible excuse for inability to implement the election programmes; and very soon signs were not

wanting that the people were not willing to listen to excuses. They had done what had been asked of them, and now they wanted results.

Even before the election victory of May, 1970, the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party, in calling upon the people to reject the farce of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, and not participate in the general elections in any way, had warned that, so long as the present imperialist-feudalist-big bourgeois economic framework was not broken, and the repressive bourgeois state machinery that acted as its watchdog was not smashed by force, whatever be the government that came to power through the means of bourgeois parliamentary democracy, it would not be able to solve the fundamental problems of the people.

The warning proved correct, Parliamentary democracy in Ceylon has been a sort of a game of musical chairs between the Senanayake and the Bandaranaike families. From 1947 to 1956, for a period of 9 years, the Senanayake clan ruled. For the next nine years, from 1956 to 1965, the Bandaranaike-husband and wife took over. Then from 1965 to 1970, the Senanayakes took over. Now the pendulum has swung back to the Bandaranaike, into whose band wagon, in the meanwhile, had crept in the LSSP and the Keuneman revisionist clique (Ceylon's revisionist Communist Party). But no fundamental change took place in the social and economic structure. Ceylon continued to be a neo-colonial and semi-feudal country. The commanding heights of its economy still continued to be occupied by foreign imperialists. The greater part of the tea and rubber plantations, which still brought in the greater share of the national wealth of the country, the majority of the country's banks, the import-export trade, shipping—all remained in foreign imperialist hands. The puppets that danced on the political platform were made in Ceylon, but the invisible strings, with which they are manipulated, are still pulled from London and Washington.

Despite all the loud and empty talk of socialism, no fundamental changes were made in this situation after the United Front government came to power in May, 1970. Instead, the people were treated to the sight of intellectual imbeciles holding forth about building socialism, while the majority of the country's money spinners—the tea and rubber plantations—and the banks continue



to be in foreign imperialist hands. New definitions of socialism were invented. People were told that socialism meant greater discipline, hard work and tightening of belts. But they saw no matching sacrifices at the top. Members of Parliament voted themselves additional allowances. "Socialist" ministers built themselves new air-conditioned offices. The Prime Minister's children went abroad for their education. The number of Benz cars and palatial buildings were on the increase. Not even the much publicised rent restriction laws could be brought into effect, because some of the country's biggest house owners were inside the cabinet. The much-promised declaration of the assets of the M.P.s never saw the light of day.

In the meantime, the cost of living kept sky-rocketting. The already insurmountable problem of unemployment was made worse by the new government's action in taking political revenge and dismissing thousands of workers engaged by the last regime in many of the State Corporations—including 10,000 from the Land Army recruited by the former regime. Only China's generosity in supplying rice and interest-free loans enabled the government to fulfill its promise of granting a second measure of rice on the ration, and to just carry on. Men who had been most vehement critics of the former government's policy of seeking loans from the World Bank overnight became mendicants with begging bowls and implored loans from the same World Bank.

It was no wonder that frustration and disillusionment swept the country—particularly, the youth. The disillusionment was made worse by the fact that people expected a lot from the Trotskyites and the revisionists, who were now part of the government, and who, in their time, made the most revolutionary speeches and even more revolutionary promises. But no sooner had they donned the robes of ministerial office and occupied their air conditioned offices, they became the most stout defenders of the establishment and the status quo. Correctly did Lenin describe a coalition government as a joint cabinet of the bourgeoisie with the renegades from socialism.

There cannot be any doubt that these erstwhile left parties has completely forfeited the confidence of the people and, more

particularly, of the youth. The April events completely stripped these sham revolutionaries and exposed them nakedly as a bunch of counter-revolutionaries, who did not have the slightest compunction in condoning the worst blood bath and mass murder that Ceylon had seen, as well as in condoning the detention without trial for already 12 months of over 14,000 detainees of all political hues.

The present state of affairs, where all civil and democratic rights, including the right of Habeas Corpus and the right to hold public meetings have been suspended, and a virtual military rule exists under rigorously enforced state of emergency, and a strict press censorship has completed the disillusionment about bourgeois parliamentary democracy. The people's government, which was supposed to have been elected by the overwhelming majority of the people (actually it was only by 49%) cannot today show itself before the people without a show of armed police might. The "People's" Prime Minister can hardly move out of her house without heavy armed escort.

The Marxist-Leninist analysis that, whichever of the bourgeois parties occupy the seats of power, the real power resides with the army, navy, air force and the police forces, the real guardians and watchdogs of exploitation—whose officers are still trained at Sandhurst and New Scotland Yard—has been proved to the hilt. An unelected minor minion of bureaucracy, like a village official, e.g. a grama sevaka, was able to get an M.P or an M.M.C. into jail, while an elected House of Representatives looked on helplessly and impotently and even devoid of the power of speech. The performance of Ceylon's House of Representatives, which counts in its ranks some of the loudest tub-thumpers that Ceylon has produced, will surely go down in the history of bourgeois parliamentary democracy as one of the most impotent ones. One and all were scared: and one and all did not dare go to their electorates for quite some time. Even the Prime Minister's appearance at parliament became a rare occasion. The military and the police had the government exactly where they wanted it. Ceylon had perfected another first—a military government with a civil facade.

It is these twin factors—people's disillusionment with bourgeois parliamentary democracy and with former left parties—coupled with the bankruptcy of the U. F. Government to solve the



people's problems that paved the way for the J. V. P. to win the support among a certain section of the rural youth who, in Ceylon, constitute a big share of the population.

The exposure of both the bankruptcy of the bourgeois parliamentary democracy and the betrayal and treachery of the Trotskyites and the modern revisionists and the advocacy of a revolutionary path as the only means for a social change was really done in Ceylon most consistently and systematically by the Marxist-Leninist Ceylon Communist Party—ever since it split from the revisionist party and constituted itself as a separate party in 1964.

But, just as in 1956 the late Mr. S. W. R. D. Bandaranayake, with the addition of a judicious appeal to issues of religion, language and race, ran away with the radical slogans popularised by the left movement before his time, so now the J. V. P. reaped the benefit of the work of the Marxist-Leninists by adding an appeal to communalism (anti-Indianism) and caste. To understand this might appear to be difficult. In the past, politicians from D. S. Senanayake to R. G. Senanayake and Hema Basanayake and K. M. P. Rajaratne combined communalism with reactionary politics. The J. V. P. tried out a new mixture. They wrapped up a crude appeal to anti-Indianism (the plantation workers of Indian origin, who form a substantial portion of Ceylon's working class, were portrayed as pawns of Indian expansionism) with a revolutionary phraseology. In this they seemed to have been more successful. For additional measure, they also subtly exploited an appeal to caste. Most of the leaders of the J. V. P. belong to one caste.

This brings us to an analysis of the character of the J. V. P. Most of the analyses made by the leaders of the government are devoid of any seriousness. Starting from an analysis that the J. V. P. was an agent of the reactionaries, they ended with the analysis that they were extreme left adventurers. What is the real nature of the J. V. P.?

The first point that must be made is that, whatever be the questionable nature of the leadership, the rank and file seems to have been honestly revolutionary minded, with a sense of dedication that must be admired, and a willingness to sacrifice even their lives—unheard of before in Ceylon. The pity is that

such sacrifice was made in vain. There cannot be any doubt that a section of the leadership was manipulated from behind by reactionary forces for their own end.

*There is little doubt that this movement was called into being to oppose the growing influence of Mao Tsetung Thought in Ceylon.* Since the theories of Trotskyism and the revisionist theories of peaceful co-existence and peaceful transition through parliament were getting increasingly discredited, reaction had to summon to its assistance the pseudo-revolutionary theory associated with the name of Che Guevara in order to distract the attention of the youth from the revolutionary truths of Mao Tsetung Thought. They used half-quotations from Mao Tsetung to deceive their followers. But their philosophy was out and out anti-Marxist-Leninist.

They popularised the theory of Che Guevara that a relatively small group of armed bravadoes or guerrillas could capture the state machine, and afterwards attract the people to itself. This is a favourite theory of the petty-bourgeoisie, with its strong individualism and its distrust of the working class. It rules out mass participation and is the very anti-thesis of the theory of people's war as expounded by Comrade Mao Tsetung.

Comrade Mao taught us that "The revolutionary war is a war of the masses; it can be waged only by mobilising the masses and relying on them". The almost complete lack of mass support and near complete isolation from the organised working class was one of the most noticeable characteristics of the so-called insurrection by the J. V. P.

Their military tactics were also derived from adventurist theories of a quick victory in a one-day revolution, which sprang from complete lack of understanding of the real strength of the enemy, as well as of the well known theories of a protracted people's war advanced by Comrade Mao Tsetung. The tactics employed by the J. V. P. in simultaneously attacking so many police stations, which are the centres of the strength of the enemy, was almost infantile in conception, and could only result in the mass slaughter that took place.

The leader of the J. V. P. was an ex-student of Moscow's Lumumba University, who had been given an anti-Soviet certificate



and expelled from the Soviet Union in order to facilitate his infiltration of Marxist-Leninist ranks. Having failed to win the leadership, he went out to form the J. V. P.

The J. V. P. itself was not organised as a political party in any sense we know. It held no conferences — secret or public. The leadership was not elected, while the leader was surrounded by the most unimaginable and false cult of personality. Despite calling themselves Marxist-Leninists, they were innocent and ignorant of democratic centralism. This was an ideal situation in which agent provocateurs and even hidden reactionaries could function and direct the movement from behind for their reactionary ends.

There is a number of points about the J. V. P. which would probably now never be fully cleared up. It has now been established that, during the former U. N. P. rule, two special reports on the activities of the J. V. P., prepared by the special security adviser to the government (a former Inspector General of Police) and a further and fuller report, compiled on the basis of these two reports by the Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs, had been submitted to the then Prime Minister. These reports are said to have contained accurate information (as events proved them) of the places where the activities of the J. V. P. were centred, and a list of their important personnel and the type of activities they were engaged, including the type of training they were having. *The Prime Minister did not submit this report either to the Security Council, which is composed of the chiefs of the armed forces, or to the Cabinet.* Nor did he take any action whatsoever on these reports. The police merely arrested a few individuals, including the leader, and later released them—thus giving them a political build-up.

Even though challenged in parliament, the former Prime Minister had given no satisfactory explanation for his inactivity. Equally intriguing is why the new government, too, failed to act. The reports were all at the office of the Special Branch of the CID. The same personnel, with minor changes, continued. Why did they not take any action or advise the government to take any action? We will, perhaps, never know. However, it is interesting to note that it is this same personnel, who had known all about the JVP intentions all along, who are today conducting the investigations!

Equally intriguing was the press build-up given to the JVP by the bourgeois press. Hardly a day passed, when one or the other of the three main newspapers of the bourgeois group did not carry some news or other about the JVP. No other political movement in Ceylon had ever enjoyed such a propaganda build-up. The Ceylon Daily News would not like to be reminded of it, but it actually carried a centre page article, wherein Wijeyaweera was described as next in succession to D. S. Senanayake and S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike! All these cannot be accidents!

Then comes the question of arms and ammunition. Even if we accept the story that the guns were stolen, where did such a collection of sophisticated bombs, never before seen in Ceylon, come from? Worse, where did so much ammunition come from? The amount of money alleged to have been spent by the JVP also needs accounting. The only satisfactory answer so far given is that the merchants belonging to a particular caste down South had so far swallowed the anti-Indian propaganda that they coughed up thousands of rupees! It is not an altogether improbable explanation.

In any case, the crude anti-Indian communal campaign carried out by the JVP is undoubted. They even talked of oceans of Tamil blood through which the Sinhalese would have to wade to protect the Sinhala State. This accounts for the fact that hardly any worthwhile incident occurred in the Northern and Eastern provinces, and the plantation districts, where the Ceylon and Indian Tamils live. It is also a fact that there were no Tamils among the membership or leadership of the JVP.

The timing of the insurrection itself, without giving sufficient time for the new government to get exposed and isolated from the people, betrayed either political immaturity or the presence of agent provocateurs. We have already referred to the idiocy of the tactics of attacking all police stations simultaneously—considering the fact that the government's armed forces could at any time have mustered a much larger force—as, indeed, they did.

The JVP also had no clear-cut political programme—apart from the criticisms of the government and certain points picked from earlier programmes of the left parties. The political maturity



of the membership of the JVP was shockingly low. All their political education was condensed to a bare five lectures, and they were not encouraged to read outside it. There was also the practical difficulty of the paucity of books in Sinhala on Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought. Therefore, a mixture of crude communalism and revolutionary phraseology, which Wijeyaweera had learned at Lumumba University, were passed off and accepted as Marxism-Leninism.

In fact, it was this low political level and haphazard method of recruitment that brought about the situation under which many of those arrested turned informers and gave information to the CID.

The JVP also made no attempt to build a united front of all revolutionary classes and groups against the common enemy.

At the same time, we must be objective and point out the positive aspects of this movement. The JVP preached the gospel of revolution. But in this they were not unqualified like the Marxist-Leninists, because the JVP supported the UF candidates at the last elections and, even after the government was formed, declared their willingness even to dissolve themselves, if the government would build socialism. Thus, the illusion in parliamentary socialism was kept going. However, the main emphasis was on revolution.

They also did correct by concentrating on the rural students and youth. This was a generation which had not listened to the political classes conducted by the LSSP and the CP in their earlier revolutionary period. The sense of dedication, with which they imbued these youth, was truly remarkable. Their earlier tactics of carrying out all their activities in secret was correct, although they negated this after the UF election victory, and started functioning openly and concentrating on mobilising all their resources for spectacular public meetings—thereby revealing their cadres openly and permitting infiltration of their movement. The resourcefulness they used in collecting arms and training at least a section of their members in their use was also praiseworthy.

*But all these factors do not distract from the fact that, fundamentally the movement, as a whole, was counter-revolutionary. The main section of the leadership lent itself to be manipulated by reaction. They did not correctly answer the question: Who are our main enemies? Who are our friends? In other words, they had an incorrect understanding of the stage of the revolution and the nature of its immediate tasks. Glaring proof of this was the fact that not a single imperialist lost his life, nor was any damage inflicted on imperialist or feudal property. Not were big capitalists or big landlords among the casualties.*

There was also a complete lack of an effort to build a united front of all revolutionary forces that could be united against the common enemy. We have already commented on the completely wrong and infantile military tactics used by the JVP leadership without any thought for the countless young revolutionary lives that were to be sacrificed as a result. Sacrifice is unavoidable in any revolutionary struggle. But revolutionaries must avoid unnecessary sacrifices.

But all this was no excuse for the mass repression that was let loose by the government and its reactionary state machinery—principally the police and military. Under the rigorous state of emergency and complete press censorship, the country was virtually placed under military rule. Ceylon underwent a blood bath it had never dreamt of in its history.

Professor Rene Dumont, who was then in Ceylon at the invitation of the government, wrote in *Le Nouvel Observateur*, Paris: "From the Victoria Bridge I saw corpses floating down the river which flows from the North of the capital, with hundreds of immobile onlookers. This was on the 13th of April. The police who had killed these people, let the bodies float with the current in order to terrorise people".

Wilfully exaggerating the extent of the danger involved to the government, not only were all the local reactionary armed forces let loose on the people, the foreign assistance of the Indian expansionists, the western imperialists, and the Soviet social imperialists were pressed into service. The Indian navy and helicopters, Russian MIG jets and Anglo-American arms and ammunition were used to



hunt down and terrorize the people in an unprecedented manner. At one stage, there was even talk of calling in the US fleet. Anti-Korean and anti-Chinese provocations were resorted to. The staff of the North Korean Embassy was packed off despite subsequent protestation about the non-involvement of any foreign forces. The Chinese News Agency's office as well as the Bandaranaike Memorial Hall site, where the Chinese engineers and workers were putting up a Rs. 35 million project free was also raided by the police. Hundreds of books by Mao Tsetung and his pictures were confiscated, and in at least one case, the police made a bonfire of all Chinese literature.

It was only the correct diplomatic behaviour of the Chinese and their generous aid (actually offered before the insurrection) that prevented the government sliding completely into the imperialist camp. But it is worth while to note that the Cabinet took one month to announce to the public the Chinese offer of a Rs. 150 million interest-free loan.

Mrs. Bandaranaike has worked overtime to prove that the military aid she received from the imperialists and the Indian expansionists was the supreme justification of her government's policy of non-alignment. In actual fact, it was nothing but blatant interference in the internal affairs of another country. In particular, the prompt action of the Indian navy in throwing a "protective" ring round Ceylon sounded ominous for the future, and in the light of declared expansionist views in certain Indian quarters. If it is true that this government's survival was due to foreign military assistance, then it can no longer lay claim to the title of a people's government. Where were the people in the hour of need? Even if they did not actively side with the insurgents, why did they not rise in support of the government they elected?

One reason for the popular apathy was the unheard of brutalities that were inflicted on the people, guilty or innocent, by the police and the military. People were shot at sight, and arrested by the hundreds on mere suspicion or false complaint, women raped and young people subjected to unmentionable sadistic tortures that have left many crippled for life. It is only the existence of the state of emergency and full dictatorial powers granted to the armed forces that has so far saved them from the revenge of the people.

In many respects, the so-called insurgency was a god-send to the reactionary forces within and behind the government. They made wholesale arrests of any and every person who had been critical of the government or not supported it one hundred per cent—irrespective of whether such a person was connected with the insurgency or not. In particular all revolutionary and potentially revolutionary forces felt the heavy hand of repression. Several leading members of the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party as well as the leaders of the trade unions led by it were detained and continue to be so detained, despite the fact that the Party had been the first political organisation to expose the counter-revolutionary nature of the JVP long before the insurrection. Among those arrested was the general secretary of the Party. The Party's headquarters was raided, its press wilfully damaged, and several hundreds of Sinhala and Tamil translations of works by Comrade Mao Tsetung as well as other books removed and never returned. Thus, the reactionary forces hoped to silence the revolutionary movement once for all. Included among those arrested and detained were several prominent members of the SLFP who however, were known to be pro-Chinese.

Also arrested was an LSSP M.P. and president of its Youth League on charges of being suspected of being a member of the JVP. The failure of the LSSP, the second biggest partner in the United Front government, to obtain his release, will go down as one of the most shameful episodes in the history of the LSSP. *In contrast was the way in which Mr. J. R. Jayawardena got his son released within four hours of his arrest on similar grounds.* This was a shrewd investment for the government, because it effectively shut the mouth of Mr. Jayawardena, Leader of the Opposition, on all fundamental matters concerned with the emergency and the detainees. But it also showed the class bias of this government. After all, the Jayawardenas and the Bandaranayakes belong to the same class!

Apart from these, over 15,000 people, mainly the youth, were arrested and are being kept detained without trial for being suspect of having been connected with the JVP. Several thousands surrendered on a solemn promise of an amnesty by the Prime Minister. But they, too, are being kept in continuous detention. It took Egypt



and Pakistan, which were faced with a much bigger political upheaval, to sort out matters, bring the ring-leaders to trial, release the rest, and remove the state of emergency and lift press censorship in a much shorter period. But in our little Ceylon, the investigations are going on at a snail's pace—if they are going on at all.

One aspect of these arrests that cannot escape comment is the fact that not a single Trotskyite was arrested, despite the fact that Ceylon boasts of a number of Trotskyite groups, and that the leaders of some of these groups had appeared on common platforms with the JVP and were quite close to it. That is another mystery, which we cannot unravel.

But it is in the economic front that the government took hold of the opportunity with both hands to introduce anti-popular measures, which even previous UNP governments had not dared to do. Taking shelter under the bayonets pointed at a helpless people, who had been denied the right of assembly, speech or strike or any other form of protest, the government proceeded to fulfil almost all the conditions laid down by the American-dominated World Bank before it would grant Ceylon a loan. Bus and train fares, postal and telephone rates, electricity charges, were all upped. The prices of bread, sugar, milk, petrol, cigarettes, were increased. The rice subsidy was slashed, while a charge was made for the health services, which were hitherto free. The cost of living soared still higher. The UNP's supporters greeted this year's budget by the LSSP's Dr. N. M. Perera with lighting of crackers!

Accompanying the heaping of all these huge burdens on the people was the terrific increase of expenditure on behalf of the armed forces. This island of peace, the repository of the pure doctrine of non-violence preached by Lord Buddha is to increase the strength of the armed forces and the police by 25% during the current year. The total Army vote in the 1971 budget has gone up from Rs. 81,069,093 to Rs. 151,779,255. The Navy vote has gone up from Rs. 23,778,540 to Rs. 36,601,880. The vote for purchase of arms and ammunition and stores have gone up from Rs. 1,490,000 to Rs. 4,800,000. Ceylon is well on the way to becoming a police state.

The conditions are all being laid for Ceylon to be the beneficiary of neo-colonial aid from the World Bank, which will still further tie our economy to the chariot wheels of foreign imperialism. The United Front government has proved that, no matter whether Rama rules or Ravana rules, so long as the present economic set up continues unbroken, the system of imperialist, feudalist and capitalist exploitation will continue uninterrupted.

The masses are now being told that socialism means greater discipline and hard work. This is bunkum. *Socialism means the abolition of capitalism*, and this is precisely what Messrs. Bandaranaike, N. M. Perera and Pieter Keuneman have not done and never intend to do. Hard work has to be a common factor for both capitalism and socialism. Under capitalism, the results of the back-breaking toil of the workers goes to enrich the capitalist and landlord. Under socialism, the benefit of hard work should accrue to the workers and peasants. No amount of dishonest sophistry by men with double doctorates can hide this simple truth.

The net result is that the outbreak of the insurgency has given a god-sent opportunity to the government and the reactionaries behind it to impose a virtual military dictatorship over the people, and, under cover of it, introduce all the unpopular economic measures to prop up the existing imperialist—feudal—big bourgeois economic system of exploitation, which is making the rich richer and the poor poorer.

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## CHAPTER VII

### Conclusions

The fundamental reason why all the basic problems, including the communal problems, facing the people of Ceylon remain unsolved is due to the neo-colonial nature of the country's economy and its deepening economic crisis. The country has been in a continuing state of economic crisis for years. This economic crisis is due to our inability to produce the consumer goods needed by an ever-expanding population, or to import them in exchange for the prices fetched by our export crops. The cause for this state of affairs is the fact that the prices of Ceylon's export crops,—mainly tea, rubber and coconut—on which the prosperity or otherwise of our economy depends, is decided by the vagaries of the imperialist—controlled international market, over which Ceylon has no control.

This situation, in turn, is caused by the excessive dependence of our economy on tea and rubber, and because the commanding heights of our economy—a greater part of our plantations, which still produce the larger share of our national wealth, the majority of our banks, the major share of our export-import trade, shipping, etc.—are still dominated by foreign imperialists. For decades, now, the imperialists have systematically depressed the prices of our tea and rubber. Equally systematically they have increased the prices of their exports to us, like fertilizer, machinery, etc. Thus, Ceylon is being bled on both sides. A part of this loot is syphoned back to us in the form of aid or loan, for which we have to pay interest, and also feel grateful. Despite 23 years of so-called independence and so many changes of government, no government—be it UNP, SLFP or UF—has done anything to basically break this stranglehold of foreign imperialism on our economy.

Every time the crisis takes a serious turn, all governments have been adept at transferring the burdens of the economic crisis on to the shoulders of the people. In 1953, the UNP government removed the rice subsidy and increased postal and railway rates, and deprived the school children of their mid-day bun. In 1962, the SLFP attempted to reduce the rice subsidy,

but was forced to retreat. In 1967, the UNP devalued the rupee, and halved the rice ration. At the same time, it resorted to heavy borrowing from the U.S. imperialist-dominated World Bank. In 1971, the United Front government has increased the railway, bus, electricity, telephone, postal rates and increased the prices of petrol, cigarettes and many other essential consumer goods, and curtailed free health services.

Most of these measures were taken by the respective governments at the dictates of the World Bank as a pre-condition for the grant of loans. Ceylon's future has already been mortgaged to the World Bank. Empty talks about socialism have been accompanied by increased burdens on the people with no corresponding sacrifices from the affluent. The most ridiculous performance is by those who talk about building socialism while the plantations, which are the country's biggest money spinners are left in the hands of foreign imperialists! The latest admirer of the United Front government's attempt at building socialism is Mr. J. R. Jayawardene, leader of the Opposition, deputy leader of the UNP, and one of the most astute leaders of the capitalist class in Ceylon. He has not merely expressed support to the government, but is even expected to join it as a Minister. From the interest of his class, he realises that this government is delivering the goods for the capitalist class much better than the UNP could; and that it is the best bulwark against revolution and should, therefore, be propped up!

Despite nearly forty years of adult franchise and 23 years of so-called independence, no fundamental problem facing Ceylon has been solved. In fact, they have got worse. Unemployment has reached unmanageable proportions, while the cost of living has sky-rocketed to unimaginable heights. There is no solution in sight. The reason is quite simple. A solution to the economic problems facing Ceylon can be found only through the liberation of its economy from the stranglehold of foreign imperialism. This cannot be achieved through bourgeois parliamentary democracy—no matter how many governments are changed..



All this goes to prove that so long as the imperialist—feudal—big bourgeois economic framework remains unbroken, and so long as the bourgeois, repressive state machinery that protects it is not smashed by force, no matter whichever be the government that comes to power by means of the farce called bourgeois parliamentary democracy, the fundamental problems of the people will remain unsolved.

The only answer is the path of revolution illuminated by the radiance of Marxism - Leninism - Mao Tsetung Thought.

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## AN ADDENDUM

As the final pages of this book are being printed, the news comes that Ceylon has been declared a republic within the British Commonwealth. This is just another hoax, by which the United Front Government hopes to fool and deceive the people. But it is unlikely that it would succeed.

Constitutions—even the best drawn ones—are mere pieces of paper. Their strength depends on who holds state power. This will continue as of old. The same British-trained armed forces, police and bureaucracy will continue to rule Ceylon, and protect the imperialist—feudal—capitalist exploitation, which will be just as severe.

Let it be remembered that it was not the old constitution that prevented succeeding governments from implementing correct policies. SLFP governments nationalised bus services, the ports, oil companies, insurance, etc. and even abolished the Senate. But they did not do anything fundamental to change property relations. Nor will they do so now—under the new constitution. But one more excuse will go by the board. No more can they put the blame on the shortcomings of the constitution. It should also be noted that the decision to stay within the Commonwealth demonstrates the strength of British capital in Ceylon.

As for the rest, it is the same story of the old wine in new bottles.



### Quotations From Lenin

- “To forget that universal suffrage, as long as capitalists retain their property, is only one of the weapons of the bourgeois state . . . . . To forget this and confine oneself to bourgeois parliamentarism” is shamefully to betray the proletariat, desert to the side of the class enemy, the bourgeoisie, become a traitor and a renegade.
  - “The bourgeois parliament, however democratic and in however democratic a republic—is nothing but a machine for the suppression of millions of working people by a handful of exploiters—if the property and power of the capitalists is preserved.”
  - “The bourgeoisie are compelled to be hypocritical and to describe as “popular government” or democracy in general, or pure democracy, the (bourgeois) democratic republic which is, in practice, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, the dictatorship of the exploiters over the working people . . . . But, Marxists, Communists, expose this hypocrisy, and tell the workers and the working people in general the frank and straightforward truth: The democratic republic, the Constituent Assembly, general elections etc. are, in practice, the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie, and for the emancipation of labour from the yoke of capital there is no other way, but to replace this dictatorship with the dictatorship of the proletariat.”
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**E R R O R S**

<b>Page</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Instead of</b>	<b>Read</b>
20	36	1976	1796
68	25	neh-colonialism	neo-colonialism



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